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THE FISHER REVOLUTION REFORMS IN THE
ROYAL NAVY, 1890-1910; EARLY NAVAL
MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

HENRY S. MORGAN

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**THE FISHER REVOLUTION
REFORMS IN THE ROYAL NAVY, 1890-1910
EARLY NAVAL MANAGEMENT IN ACTION**

by

**Henry S. Morgan, Jr.
Commander, United States Navy**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
MANAGEMENT**

**United States Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California**

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ABSTRACT

The Royal Navy underwent, during this period, a complete transformation in materiel, personnel and purpose. The scope of this transformation was at least as great as that of the U. S. Navy in the years from 1940-1960.

The Royal Navy metamorphosis was planned and executed by one individual of extraordinary capacity and unusual personality, Admiral Lord Fisher, who maintained highly centralized control of the whole organization. The record of this period presents an interesting historical example of naval management.

This paper examines, in abbreviated form, the accomplishments, methods, personalities and problems involved.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

The study of naval history has been one of the important sources of education, as well as one of the recreations of naval officers for centuries. It is, therefore, natural in attempting to relate the science of management to Sea Power to seek a historical case in which a navy of the past presents a picture of management in action. This is particularly helpful at present since our own effort is so close at hand and so large as to be hard to see in perspective.

A case with interesting management overtones appears in the Royal Navy of England in the years from 1890 to 1910. During this period, a revolution took place in that service which rivalled, if not equalled our own metamorphosis of 1940 to 1946.

The earlier period saw the introduction of destroyers, aircraft, submarines, turbine engines, water tube boilers, long range gunnery, accurate gun fire control, oil fuel, and the battleship as we know her. It saw the final passing of masts and sails from the naval scene. At the end of the period, Great Britain was supreme at sea but for one major rival. The later period has seen the introduction of nuclear power, jet aircraft, missiles both defensive and strategic, electronic devices of all sorts, computer applications, and a host of others. During this period, the battleship passed from the scene. At

the end of the period, the United States is supreme at sea, but for one major rival.

It is evident that, in both cases, a revolution in technology took place. Any such revolution requires effort in at least three coordinated areas: the introduction of the technology as a workable fact; the provision of men and support facilities to operate the technology; and the adjustment of strategic thought to make use of the technology. Success in such a coordinated effort requires effective management. It might be referred to as the management of navies, rather than naval management.

The Royal Navy's effort differed slightly from our own, in that the preparation of the revolution was largely led, and the fruition presided over, by one man, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone. Fisher was one of the most violently controversial individuals of his own or any other time. To this day, it is difficult to find an objective statement about him. The language is more moderate; blame and praise have taken the place of vilification and panegyric, but the controversy remains. Some of the writer's interest has been generated by the question of how such a man could have led such an organization in the accomplishments which undeniably took place.

Significance

The central position of a single individual of exceptional

ability and well defined characteristics, and the smaller size of the effort compared with those of later years, are important in drawing from the history of this period examples of the management of a navy. First, the source of different decisions and methods is readily identifiable, and the success or failure of these decisions and methods is relatively easily discerned. Second, the smaller size of the organization makes the association of cause and effect more simple and more likely to be accurate.

From the management point of view, the opportunity is presented, in a naval context, to weigh the advantages of rapid, one-man, irrevocable decision in the formulation of plans against the possibility of errors which might be avoided by flexibility or assembling several points of view. The merits of instant, swift and ruthless execution of these plans despite opposition can be weighed against the attendant problems of neglected side effects, unforeseen or inferior results, and the discontent of individuals whose brushed-aside ideas may have had some validity. The merits of swift analysis and resolution of courses of action can be matched with the attendant possibility of neglecting some possible alternatives or outcomes. In a broader sense, the effects of tight centralization and the building up of a single indispensable man can be discerned. Finally, the cost of ignoring human factors and of ignoring communications which did not conform to preconceived ideas or decisions, are evident.

The Royal Navy of the period may well have required the drastic methods which were used to completely rebuild it in such a short time. The relatively small accomplishments of other turn of the century reformers of the Navy, who tried more usual methods, indicate that there was an enormous amount of inertia, dogmatism, and official obstruction to be overcome. It seems quite clear that the drastic methods employed were very important to the achievements which eventually resulted. However, the service paid a heavy price in unity and senior officer morale for these achievements. Whether this price might have been reduced without diluting the results is open to question. The not infrequent episodes which suggest that Fisher sometimes goaded subordinates and others to rage for no good reason, certainly indicate that some of the ill-feeling was unnecessary and destructive of otherwise good results. Possible alternatives of less shock effect are worth keeping in mind when considering Fisher's methods and decisions together with their results and consequences.

Purposes and Limitations of the Study

Management literature abounds in "case studies," and the use of cases is a widely respected method of study and instruction. The study of naval history, somewhat out of fashion today, is really a direct ancestor of case study.

This paper is an effort to bridge the gap between the two methods. It does not attempt a complete history of the Fisher era, but rather

to sketch the events considered most important in the transformation of the Royal Navy, and to provide a selection of critical incidents indicative in some detail of the methods used and the results. The fact that many of the achievements and most of the accompanying problems were functions of individuals fits the orientation of much of the source material available.

The years 1890 to 1910 have been chosen because during these years Fisher held a series of high appointments which enabled him to initiate, and largely complete, the action to bring to fruition the changes which he had planned in earlier years. It has been necessary to exceed these limits in some cases, particularly in discussing the results of the revolution, which were largely seen in World War I. 1890 was selected as a starting point because it was the year of Fisher's promotion to flag rank, normally accepted in any service at any era as the opening of an opportunity to bring matured ideas to reality.

Admiral Fisher's second period as First Sea Lord, in 1914-15, has been omitted except for a few useful illustrations of methods. This period, which was not particularly successful, is not characteristic of the work for which he was best known--the creation of a new naval technology. Furthermore, at the age of 73, Fisher was far from being at the height of his powers, and far from being the one-man management system he had been in earlier years.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature¹

A. The events and personalities of the Royal Navy in this period are extensively documented for three reasons. First, Fisher himself was the most controversial individual ever to occupy a position as the professional head of any major navy. Second, many of the officers who served through that period left biographies as naval officers often do. These were particularly numerous and widely published because all of them include World War I. The earlier portions without exception discuss the "Fisher era" at more or less length. Third, the Royal Navy of World War I was very much a Fisher creation. Therefore, most studies of the leadership of that time go into the Fisher era in some detail; even those which are quite superficial are led into the area because of his return as First Sea Lord in 1914-15.

This body of material divides logically into three categories: (1) Royal Navy history in the period; (2) biographical material on Fisher; and (3) other biographical material on personalities of the time.

B. Royal Navy History of the Period. The definitive work in the

¹See bibliography. Works not reviewed specifically here are annotated therein.

field is that of Professor Arthur J. Marder, of the University of Hawaii, who has been kind enough to offer encouragement and some hints on bibliography to the writer. He has covered the general history of the period in two works: The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905 and From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow; Vol. I: The Road to War 1904-1914. The later volumes have not yet been published. A letter to the writer from Professor Marder in September 1963, indicated there will eventually be four in the series, rather than two as originally planned. These works are the only ones encountered in the area which are relatively modern, thoroughly documented, and derived largely from manuscript, Royal Navy archives, and other primary material. They provide a path through the maze of other material. While quite detailed, they are assembled with precise regard for organization and chronology. Most of the material published earlier had not been intended as history, was somewhat chaotic chronologically, was largely biographical and made no pretensions toward objectivity; in the opinion of the writer, it is only the work of Professor Marder that permits the amateur to make sense of the era.

The history of the ships of the period was not available conveniently until the publication of Dr. Oscar Parkes' British Battleships, in 1956. This volume carries its subject from 1860 to 1950, and contains an enormous amount of material, mostly taken from original ships' folders in the Admiralty. These folders contained the preliminary

sketches as well as other miscellaneous materials on the designs, and therefore reflect the development of the ships quite well. A general work of passing interest is Naval Administrations, 1827-1892, written in 1897 by Sir John Briggs, a senior Admiralty civil servant. This volume provided insight into the Admiralty point of view, as opposed to the fleet, in the '90's and is interesting in the quite large amount of progress shown during the mid-Victorian era in improving the Royal Navy, which prepared the soil for the Fisher reforms. Briggs actually held his position, which involved daily contact with the Board of Admiralty, from 1840 until 1892.

The standard Royal Navy historical works are not particularly productive in connection with the Fisher period, since this history became submerged in importance by the first World War. Almost all the work on the naval aspects of that conflict, of which there is much, refers to the Fisher era as the source of the instrument with which the war was fought, but does not discuss the actual building up of the Navy in sufficient detail for purposes of this study. As mentioned earlier, the Fisher of 1914-15, aged 72, who figures in World War I when he returned as First Sea Lord, was by no means the same man as 10 or 20 years before. Naturally, the history of World War I is important in evaluating the results of the "Revolution." The Admiralty official history, Naval Operations, and Admiral Jellicoe's three volumes, The Grand Fleet, The Crisis of the Naval

War, and The Submarine Peril, give the 'party line.' As an antidote, two interesting recent critical works on World War I are Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond's contemporary diaries edited by Professor Marder as Portrait of an Admiral, and Captain S. W. Roskill's The Strategy of Sea Power. These two books are lumped together in this fashion because of the marked similarity in the opinions expressed. This is considered understandable. Roskill regards Richmond as one of the more important naval historians, and has followed in his footsteps into academic life at Cambridge University. Much of the pertinent World War I material is derived from the naval biographical material discussed later. Illuminating comments come from those who were captains at that time, writing later during the latter '30's when there was no longer any reason to withhold opinions.

Also to be classed as Royal Navy history, and of considerable importance, is the compilation published as The Fisher Papers by the Navy Records Society in 1960. Edited by LCDR P. K. Kemp, the Admiralty historian, the first volume, which is so far the only one available, covers the years 1904-06. The "papers" are mostly official and semi-official papers and correspondence, such as the original "scheme," as presented to the Board in 1904, and the minutes of the committee which worked up the Dreadnought designs. This material is helpful, showing the reforms in a fully matured form, as they came to the Admiralty and the service, replete with tables, diagrams, and

detailed reasoning. This places in perspective the impression of headlong and unreasoning haste created by some of the correspondence, and charged by some of the controversialists. Future students will need to use this series along with Professor Marder's works.

C. Fisher Biographical Material. The standard biography is by Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon. This is a most comprehensive two volume work, but can hardly be called entirely objective. This is logical, because Bacon was closely associated with Fisher for a number of years. Professor Marder has edited Lord Fisher's correspondence in three volumes, entitled Fear God and Dread Nought. This should be considered biographical in nature, in that quite comprehensive narrative and explanatory material is included. Fisher himself left Memories and Records, in 2 volumes, but this was written in 1919 and 1920, when he was very elderly, resembles some of his more acid and volcanic correspondence, and is to be regarded as purely background rather than basic material.

It may seem surprising that so little biographical work exists on an individual whose importance is so widely conceded. The answer is that his life was so bound up with the service that there was no significant aspect not closely related to the Navy.

D. Navy Biographical Material. Another large body of material is found in the biographies of naval officers. These are particularly numerous in this period, for reasons already mentioned.

This biographical material is useful in a variety of ways. First, many, particularly those written since World War I, contain reflections drawn from personal experience on the results of the Fisher revolution and the effects, good and bad, on the service. Most of the earlier works maintain a reticent silence on the controversial aspects, but those written after Fisher's death in 1920 are quite frank. Almost all provide numerous illuminating episodes of Fisher's methods and more conspicuous personal characteristics.

Those which were written by or about officers older than Fisher also play some part. These books are almost the only source having any vitality which give a picture of how the Royal Navy of the mid and late Victorian era thought, acted, and lived. This is important for two reasons. First, it provides the context in which the Fisher revolution must be examined for understanding. Second, the accounts given point out clearly the reasons that impelled those in opposition to Fisher, and show the amount of initial work that preceded and supported the reforms. It is easy to get the impression that Fisher worked in a vacuum, as a solitary messiah, who provided a sudden flash of revelation which illuminated a dark world. This impression is dispelled by reading of the work and opinions of Fisher's seniors and subordinates, which give shadings to a black and white scene. That such material is still thought of in England as important historical matter of popular interest is well illustrated by a work

published in 1962, The Fleet that Jack Built. This book contains short biographies of such individuals as Fisher, Jellicoe, Keyes, and other well known flag officers, forming a short history of the Royal Navy from early Victorian times until after World War I.

There are a very large number of these biographical works. Those which are particularly pertinent are cited in footnotes. Others, consulted at one time or another, are listed in the bibliography.

E. General Comment. The overall loyalties of many of the individuals involved in some of the controversies led to an understandable reluctance to publicize service quarrels. This means that most of the material on this aspect of the subject is secondary. The only primary source of such material, aside from Fisher's correspondence and Richmond's diaries, are newspapers, correspondence, and Admiralty meeting minutes. Such sources have been utilized by Professor Marder and others, but naturally most of these were not available, nor could they have been effectively utilized within the time limits of this study.

A conspicuous exception to the general reticence in the contemporary period is found in Lord Charles Beresford's The Betrayal, which he wrote in 1911, after his retirement from the active list in 1909. Some of the assertions of this book are briefly analysed in the discussion of the Fisher-Beresford controversy later in this paper; it furnishes useful material on the side of the controversy

not covered in most of the other works available. The book is strongly controversial, as might be inferred from the title. Charges of falsehood are found on every page; the then current First Lord (Reginald McKenna) is flatly called a liar by name on page 31. It surpasses in violence some of the strong language found in Fisher's correspondence.

CHAPTER III

Scheme of Presentation

The reader is first asked to consider the status of the Royal Navy in 1890. For those unfamiliar with the period, this is desirable to provide the context. The part that Fisher had played up to then is also discussed in this portion, so far as it reflects on the overall scene.

Thereafter the "Fisher reforms" themselves are discussed. The arrangement of these sections is by chronological order of the introduction of the main scheme; the origins and consequences in a number of cases overlap both backwards and forwards, but this seems the easiest way to preserve a semblance of order. The reforms themselves are discussed only in sufficient detail to show what was accomplished and the methods used, with suitable references for illustration. Chapter XI discusses some of the major controversies, such as the Fisher-Beresford feud, which affected the service before World War I, the nature and impact of which are not made fully clear in the chronological section. Chapter XII does the same for Fisher as a leader and personality, drawing together and amplifying some points which appear only by inference in the earlier narrative portion.

Chapter XIII deals with a few pertinent aspects of the performance of the Royal Navy in World War I. No pretense is made of a broad evaluation of this performance; years of profound study have been devoted

to this subject by much better qualified individuals. However, it is appropriate to discuss some of the more controversial aspects of the struggle which have been attributed to Fisher's influence. That the echoes of the arguments still persist is illustrated by the following statement from a book published in 1963:

For the blockade war which came, Fisher had not prepared; he had starved the Navy of convoying overseas for the sake of the Dreadnought; happily for him and for Britain, Germany had almost equally lacked perception.

This is a statement both oversimplified and superficial, and yet it is embodied in a definitive work of biography.¹

Some conclusions, both specific and abstract, are drawn in Chapter XIV.

Method of Study

This paper has resulted from organizing, filling gaps in, and drawing specific references from, reading which has extended over a considerable number of years. Naturally, a large amount of material has been omitted which might contribute to a more complete understanding of the period, but which is not directly related.

Chronology

A brief chronology of Lord Fisher's career is provided in Appendix I. Reference to it is suggested for orientation.

¹Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour.

Royal Navy Organization

No explanation of the details of organization of the Royal Navy is included. Most phraseology and structure is clear from the context, and many of the differences persist to this day and are familiar to most U. S. naval officers.²

Note should be made, however, of the constitutional status of the "Board," or Board of Admiralty, frequently referred to. This remained substantially unchanged for 363 years, until April 1, 1964, when the Admiralty ceased to be a cabinet department, becoming part of an overall "Department of Defence." The Board consists of the First Lord, the head of the service, who is a civilian cabinet member; the First Sea Lord, who is the professional head and senior officer of the Navy, and the naval officers and civilians who head the principal sections of the Admiralty. The exact positions represented on the board have varied considerably. At the moment there are nine members; in Fisher's day there were five or six. While the First Lord is the head of the service, and responsible to the Cabinet and so to Parliament for the Navy's mission, the group of "Lords Commissioners for Executing the Office of Lord High Admiral" have a collective

²A minor exception is the rank of Lieutenant Commander, which did not exist until 1914. A Lieutenant of more than eight years seniority wore $2\frac{1}{2}$ stripes, but an officer was a Lieutenant until promoted Commander. A Lieutenant in command of his own ship was called "Lieutenant and Commander" in official correspondence.

responsibility implied by their ancient title. This becomes important. because while the First Lord is the head, with the First Sea Lord as his principal professional adviser, all the members participate legally in responsibility for the decisions; the First Lord's and First Sea Lord's positions have sometimes been referred to as "primus inter pares." The members have the alternative, indeed the constitutional duty, of resignation from their positions if they are unable to concur in a decision. A threat by the Sea Lords to resign in a body, a by-no-means unheard-of event, is therefore a formal and perfectly correct refusal of the professional members to concur in a decision of the First Lord or the Cabinet. This differs very much from our own constitutional responsibilities; it is the result of extending the principle of Parliamentary responsibility to a group instead of to an individual. This point is explained at length because the tradition of collective responsibility becomes important in understanding some of the events and some of the controversy over Fisher's methods.

CHAPTER IV

The Royal Navy in 1890

A. General Comments.¹ The Royal Navy in 1890 has been much maligned. Pictured originally by Fisher and others interested in reform and later by other writers, as an organization of massive inertia, populated by officers of profound ignorance, vast prejudice and complete imperception, more study reveals that there were many officers of intelligence, ambition, and high motivation to do the best they could for their service

Changes were taking place and were continuing to take place, and most administrations could point to some accomplishment which was a considerable step forward.

The most important influence was the period of almost unbroken peace which had lasted since 1815. There had been numerous minor "police action" scuffles, in China, Africa, and other places. The largest of these had been the "river war" in Egypt, the second phase of which did not end until 1898, but which commenced in 1882. The vast majority of combat operations in this period took the form of landing naval brigades of sailors, which were the forerunners of the fleet marine force of our day. The result was two-fold. First, the

¹Sources: Lewis, The Navy of Britain; Parkes, British Battleships; Briggs, Naval Administrations; Beresford, Memoirs; Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built.

development of the Royal Navy as a force for major war had proceeded in a vacuum, with only the steps taken by other navies in the same period as a source of outside stimulus. Second, the mission of the Navy had developed largely into protection of trade, both seaborne and ashore, in the less developed areas of the world. The situation of the leaders of the service, no matter how enlightened, was a little like that of Robert E. Lee when he claimed to have "learned everything about commanding fifty United States dragoons and forgotten everything else" during the 1850's. The only major combatant force of the Royal Navy was the Mediterranean Fleet; the strategic reason for this was a vague general view that the French fleet was based at Toulon, and the Mediterranean was the key to Europe. While reasonably valid, this idea had remained unchanged since the days of Nelson, and hardly stimulated original thought.

The Crimean War had been fought by ships closely resembling those of Nelson except for rudimentary steam engines; there had been no naval fighting, although the shore bombardments conducted stimulated some invention in the way of armor protection. The American Civil War had proved the effectiveness of armor protection originally introduced by the French in 1858, against explosive shells; however, it was not easy to see the applicability of the design of two entirely unseaworthy coast defense ships to the problems of a world-wide navy and the open ocean.

There had been two recent "naval scares," the first in 1878 over war with Russia, and the second in 1885, caused by anxiety over conflict with France. Both situations had caused a flurry of action. There was a realization that the Navy was not organized or equipped for war and that the Admiralty had no effective means for organizing or equipping the fleet. Lord Charles Beresford, then a captain, first came to prominence in the second of these, when he submitted his "confidential memorandum" of 1886, while a member of the Board of Admiralty. It is unnecessary to quote this, but two results were the preparation of war and mobilization plans in some detail for the first time, and the passage of the Naval Defense Act of 1889, the first major integrated shipbuilding program. While Beresford cannot by any means be given sole credit for these steps, this episode illustrates two things: that there were aggressive and forward thinking officers in the service who were supported by their civilian superiors; and that Beresford, at any rate in his younger days, was not wholly the unintelligent, obstructive intriguer he has often been labelled.

B. The Ships. As a consequence of design having developed in a vacuum, the ships were a most heterogeneous collection. Since the first ironclad, HMS WARRIOR, completed in 1861, no more than 4, and usually only one or two, ships of a class were built. There had been wide variations in size, gun distribution, speed, armor, cruising radius and all other characteristics. Ship types in service regard

from HMS NILE, armed with four 13.5 inch guns and six 6 inch, displaying 13,000 tons and generally not unlike our own OREGON of Spanish war days, back to the contemporaries of the WARRIOR, which resembled nothing so much as a sailing frigate with iron plated sides. In between were an enormous variety of "broadside" and "turret" ships. The first homogeneous class of ships were the seven ROYAL SOVERIGN type of the 1889 Naval Defense Act program, none of which had been completed by 1890.

Masts and yards were still very much part of the naval scene. The last seagoing battleship to carry a full rig was delivered to the Navy in 1881. Square rig was retained for cruising ships on distant stations until nearly the turn of the century, although the masts and sails were removed from the battleships very soon after 1885. This retention of a rig resulted not so much from resistance to change as from doubts as to the wisdom of ships proceeding to distant parts of the world without auxiliary power. The rigs were conceded to be a useless encumbrance in combat. They were retained as an auxiliary for cruising and a means of providing the crew with drill and exercise. So far was this carried that INFLEXIBLE, completed in 1881, a most advanced large turret ship and one of Fisher's commands, was equipped with a full rig which was intended to be removed on the outbreak of war.² To provide some perspective on this point, it

² Parkes, British Battleships.

may be noted that not until 1880 did the number of new steamships built for the merchant service in England exceed the number of sailing ships.³ All heavy guns installed were muzzle loading until 1886. Breechloaders had been introduced in the '60's, but after some difficulties were done away with in 1868. The later heavy muzzle loaders were hydraulically pointed and loaded and had a rate of fire comparable to that of the breech loaders that replaced them, but were necessarily shorter, as they had to come inside the turrets to load. Calibers varied from 10 to 16.25 inches, with ranges and rates of fire of all sorts. The lighter guns were breechloaders by 1890, but the main armament was still muzzle loaded in most ships.

An exaggerated idea of the useful life of ships carried over from the days of the wooden walls resulted in government reluctance to spend money for new ships. This, combined with an equal reluctance for the public to see any reduction in the Navy List, signifying the strength of the country, had resulted in the retention of old ships indefinitely. Almost all the ships built since the days of the WARRIOR in 1858 were still on the list, in active or reserve status. Many had had masts removed, complete rebuilding and new machinery, but it was not practical to install breech loading guns, so the improvements were not significant compared with the cost.

³Lewis, The Navy of Britain, p. 253.

It is in the ships themselves that we see the least efficient part of the Royal Navy in 1890. Action required the education of the public, Parliament, and the government. The Naval Defense Act of 1889 represented the beginning of much hard work and pressure from both naval members and First Lords of the various Boards of the Admiralty. Almost every Board up to then could point to something accomplished, but generally not in the area of replacing ships.

C. The Officers.⁴ The officers of the service were a product of both the social structure of their country at the time and the environment of their service. It is appropriate to consider first the sources from which they were drawn, and then their professional training and promotion.

1. Sources. The officers were drawn from the upper levels of the quite rigid class structure which existed in England. While the Army, because of their larger amount of home service, tended to draw those of large fortune and very high social position, the Navy drew from the same social stratum those with some inclination toward sea service. The early age of entry tended to produce a highly indoctrinated and professional group in the main, formed homogeneously from a common background of upper class families. The phrase "officer and gentleman"

⁴Michael Lewis, The Navy of England.

had such a real meaning as to pass unmentioned in general. Conduct of personal and professional affairs in a gentlemanly manner was assumed. This structure was perpetuated by the expense involved in putting a son in the Navy. This was substantial even under the reformed scheme discussed in Chapter VI; a midshipman had cost his father about £1000 in school fees and allowances by the time he went to sea, and an allowance from home was expected by the Admiralty to supplement the pay of junior officers. Private means, therefore, was essential to starting a naval career. That these were relatively modest is indicated by the fact that almost no officers were married below the rank of Commander. What had started as a necessity because of low pay and long "commissions," or tours of 3 to 4 years on foreign stations, had become almost a custom of the service.

The Engineer officers were a group apart. They were recruited fully technically trained from the engineering colleges or the training programs of the large engine-building firms, at a much later age (early 20's). Those who entered this sort of training were normally from a skilled trade family background and a completely different social level. Their technical essentiality was admitted, even admired,⁵ but their lower and non-command status was taken as a matter of course.

⁵H. H. Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers.

2. Training. The "executive," or line officers were entered at an early, but somewhat varying age which averaged around 13 or 14. They received about two years of almost entirely professional education. They then went to sea as midshipmen for four to six years of practical training, during which time their education in such subjects as mathematics, mechanics, and navigation continued. It was considered essential that this period contain some time in a ship with masts and sails, since it ended with the examinations for promotion to Sub-Lieutenant, which were in seamanship and largely directed to masts and sails, the foundation of the seaman's art as then viewed. For example, even H. H. Smith⁶ who entered the Navy as late as 1891, retiring in 1935 as a Vice Admiral, and Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer,⁷ who retired in 1939, were both sent to masted ships for their final two years as midshipmen. This hurdle successfully surmounted, the newly promoted Sub-Lieutenant came ashore for advanced courses in professional subjects, which lasted a year. This course included technical subjects, such as gunnery and torpedo, but no engineering, other than indoctrinational. They then returned to sea.

At a later stage, as Lieutenants, the opportunity was presented

⁶Vice Admiral H. H. Smith, A Yellow Remembers.

⁷Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer, The Sea Heritage.

to a number of selected officers to take courses qualifying them as gunnery, torpedo, or navigational specialists, or what we would refer to today as sub-specialists.

This completed the education of the vast bulk of the Royal Navy officers of the period. One can readily see that the result would tend to be an officer extremely well trained in his profession as it was viewed by his immediate superior, from whom he gained most of his knowledge, and possessing quite limited education along other lines. This naturally tended to produce a certain distrust of brilliance in others, and a tendency toward rigidity in the face of change.

3. Promotion. After promotion to Lieutenant, promotion was by seniority. By 1890, "Selection" was in effect achieved to a considerable extent by deliberate continuous non-employment of the less well qualified officers, who remained on half-pay and so could not be promoted, and also by early promotion of officers whose performance was distinguished in some specific episode or manner. The effects of this system are seen in such cases as Beatty, Keyes, and Jellicoe a few years later. The first became a Rear Admiral at just under thirty-nine, as a result of being specially promoted for service in the Nile campaign in 1898 and again for service in China in the Boxer affair in 1901, which brought him to the rank of Captain. This was an altogether exceptional case; Keyes and Jellicoe were both promoted to Commander early, as a result of China service also, and thereafter promoted by seniority in their turn. Although it had the merit of

providing promotion as a result of combat performance, such a system was bound to be highly erratic in operation; the average officer of reasonably high ability was promoted strictly in his turn, passing only those who had been unemployed over the prescribed period. An enormous reform had taken place in 1864. The situation at that time is best described by illustration. In 1841, the senior lieutenant had last been promoted in 1778.⁸ In 1847, the figure was 1796.⁹ Sir Erskine Childers, then First Lord, had been responsible for the first retirement scheme, which swept away the enormous numbers of old half-pay officers who would never be promoted or employed, and stopped promotions by influence.¹⁰ The system in 1890 was working smoothly and the service was expanding, so that while there were exceptions, there was reasonable opportunity for the ambitious and talented. The early entry and exclusively professional training tended to reduce any tendency to leave the service for other pursuits.

This all seems strange to us, who have a forty-five year tradition of selection. Even Fisher, however, shared the opinion of his seniors that selection would cost more in morale than its worth, and favored a large list to permit non-employment of the less

⁸ Briggs, Naval Administration.

⁹ Michael Lewis, The Navy of Britain.

¹⁰ Briggs, op. cit.

qualified until they retired.¹¹

4. The picture presented by the large body of literature, which has been very briefly summarized here, is of a homogeneous, highly professional group, well, if narrowly, trained in their field. Their loyalty was exemplary, and while not overworked by modern standards, the vast majority were energetic. That such a training and life might lead to limited imagination on the part of many, and advanced professional thinking on the part of very few, is understandable. It is also clear that the social structure of the Navy was such that civil and diplomatic conduct towards one's brother officers was a strong norm.

D Enlisted Personnel. The enlisted personnel, or "lower deck" in British parlance, were a long service group of professionals. This in itself had been a reform introduced in the 1850's, when it had replaced the signing on of crews for individual commissions, which had been the practice since the earliest times, and is still the standard merchant ship practice.¹² Except for this step, the change from the "wooden walls" had not been great. Liberty was limited. A few petty officers and exceptionally reliable men might be allowed ashore every other day while in port. A man in the lowest class for reliability in returning from leave might be allowed ashore only once in

¹¹Fisher Papers, p. 21

¹²Lewis, op. cit.

three months.¹³ Naturally, such a policy resulted in considerable unauthorized absence. Salt provisions when away from port were the rule, refrigeration being a luxury in a few large ships. Bread, rather than biscuit, and a knife and fork to replace the seaman's clasp knife for eating purposes were still several years in the future. The periods away from England were long and the family allowance rudimentary. Discipline was extremely rigid and punishment severe. The educational level was very low indeed, although illiteracy was quite unusual. For all this hard life, the men as a whole exhibited great loyalty to their service, their officers, and their shipmates. Despite the great gulf which existed, their officers respected them as individuals and as to their rights and privileges. It was beginning to occur to some that the material available was better than the use being made of it.

This idea was encouraged by the performance of the engineering ratings, who were recruited already trained in their technical skills from civilian life, and entered as petty officers. The performance of this group was proving that a reliable and effective petty officer did not require many years of iron discipline and shipboard knowledge as a background.

The other ratings were trained ashore initially, and then in sail training ships. Their training was completed on board ship by

¹³Smith, op., cit.

the drills, which were more extensive by far than we now conduct and are discussed in Section E below. A limited number were given special gunnery training ashore to fit them as gun captains.

E. Training. To understand the training carried out, the intensity of which varied, it is necessary to remember the circumstances of the period. In the days of wooden ships success in battle depended on the ability of the crew to maintain a rapid rate of fire and to maintain the maneuverability of the ship under any circumstances. Accuracy of aim was not particularly important at the 50-200 yard ranges employed. It could produce significant results when employed, however; the loss of USS CHESAPEAKE to HMS SHANNON in 1813 was at least partly due to the earliest gunnery expert in the Royal Navy, Captain P. V. M. Broke of SHANNON.¹⁴

Proficiency under the circumstances required good physical condition of the men and a great deal of drill at handling the armament and at "evolutions" or drills such as out torpedo nets, shifting yards and so forth. Extensive target practice was not needed. In addition, seamen for thousands of years, from the Greeks until the present day, and in war or peace, have regarded a clean well-kept ship as highly desirable. As everyone knows, this habit has sound roots; cleanliness is essential for health under crowded conditions, and a well-kept

¹⁴C. S. Forester, The Age of Fighting Sail.

appearance is the outer evidence of good maintenance.

It is easy to see how these things can easily become an end in themselves in periods of prolonged peace. Nothing had occurred to provide a forceful indication that anything else was required, although the increased range of the guns was beginning to arouse some interest in more advanced gunnery exercises. The results of drills in those days were clearly visible from outside the ship, so that competition was intense. The cleanliness and sanitation of the ships was also clearly visible. Since these two aspects were the measure of performance, and of the efficiency of her Captain and Commander (Executive Officer), the emphasis was bound to be in this direction.

The training of fleets as a whole was based on making the fleet a perfectly responsive mechanism to the direction of the Admiral, with the thought that once this was accomplished, tactics of any kind could be employed. "Steam Tactics," therefore, "took the form of quadrille-like movements carried out at equal speed in accordance with geometrical diagrams in the signal book. These corybantic exercises, which entirely ignored all questions of gunnery and torpedo fire..."¹⁵

The actual state of readiness of the fleet in 1890 is difficult to judge. The more popular point of view is that the lack of realistic orientation toward war had created a state of affairs laughable in its

¹⁵Vice Admiral K. G. B. Dewar, The Navy From Within, quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 8.

absurdity. This view was expressed by many officers writing shortly after this period. Admiral Sir Percy Scott, "the father of modern gunnery," Admiral K. G. B. Dewar¹⁷ and others have held the service of the period up to ridicule for sins of omission which appear obvious today. The memoirs of even the more energetic, including Beatty,¹⁸ describe what seems like a life of recreation and enjoyment with little constructive professional activity. This point of view has been accepted by Professor Marder¹⁹ and others.

The sweeping results achieved under the stimulus of Fisher, Scott, and others, and the high ability of the officers trained in the school who were the leaders of World War I, incline the writer to a more moderate view. That the service at large did not have a clear idea of a long range objective is undoubtedly a fact. However, the introduction of steam, steel armor, and rifled guns had stimulated thought. The avoidance of target practice mentioned by many²⁰ which had prevailed in the 70's and 80's was being discountenanced. As in the present day, there was wide variation in policy from ship to ship, and fleet to fleet. Smith's discussion of the subject seems to me to strike a

¹⁷Dewar, op. cit.

¹⁸Rear Admiral W. S. Chalmers, The Life and Letters of David Beatty.

¹⁹Marder, Road to War, Chap. II.

²⁰Ibid., also many biographies.

fair balance:

I don't think we thought much about war with a big W... The general tendency of our training was to make each ship and each squadron efficient without considering how their units should be used in time of war.

He and others emphasized that there was a large amount of gunnery firing, if not under very realistic conditions.²¹ The picture considered fair by the writer is of a service of well meaning individuals, without centralized doctrine or program for guidance, but of good quality; a fertile field for the growth of a new Navy which was about to take place.

F. Place in the National Life.²² A discussion of the 1890, or the pre-World War I, Royal Navy is incomplete without a brief mention of this subject. There was simultaneously public interest and ignorance on the subject. There were a large number of naval and civilian writers on the Navy, whose works sold readily and whose articles were eagerly accepted by the editors of the day. Hurd, Thursfield, Stead, White, Spence, Jane, Pollen, Corbett and James, are a few of the well known names. This popularity is readily understood as the descendant of the tradition of the Napoleonic wars. A charge that the Navy was weak

²¹ Smith, op. cit., pp. 50-55.

²² Appropriate sources for this section are the works of some of the writers, both books and periodicals. The political cartoons of "Punch" in the period 1880-1910 are an interesting example--a substantial fraction deal with the Navy.

was always good parliamentary material, and created great press interest. The career of Beresford is perhaps the most conspicuous example of the parliamentary interest which could be generated. "Public Apathy" towards reform or change, which was sometimes complained of, was really great public confidence, born of the Napoleonic wars, and fed by the fact that the Navy to support the world-wide empire was far stronger than that of the nearest rival, which in 1890 was France. This public view had considerable influence on policies at times, as in the case of the resistance to removing old ships from the Navy List mentioned earlier. No government could afford to have the Navy weaker, i.e., smaller in numbers under their administration. A charge that the Navy was weak, as well as producing the political and journalistic capital, could produce, if at all provable, a major national panic; that of 1909 was simply the last and largest of a series which went back to the 1850's. The journalistic interest could be relied upon to add fuel to any service controversy in much the same way that journalistic interest in the Department of Defense sometimes does in our day.

As one final piece of orientation, it may be mentioned that the U. S. Navy in 1890 had yet to complete an armored seagoing warship, and had just begun construction of the "New Navy" with a few small cruisers.

G. Having reviewed in some detail the material with which Fisher was to work, the next question is logically how the man himself emerged, how he reached the position of power to take the steps discussed in Part II, and what he accomplished in the years before his ascendancy.

CHAPTER V

THE ROAD TO 1890 - FISHER AND THE NAVY

As mentioned in the introduction, Fisher's promotion to Flag Rank is the reason for taking 1890 as the start of the specific area to be examined. However, it must not be supposed that no glimmerings of progress had taken place before this, or that Fisher had not contributed substantially. To preserve reasonable chronology, it is necessary to go back a few years.

A. Fisher - Early Years. While interesting, it is a separate subject to discuss the effects of Fisher's early career on his personality in later life. The chronology given in Appendix I indicates the more important events and years. A few comments, however, are appropriate. After entering the Navy in 1854, his service in China in 1856-60 provided his first opportunity to demonstrate his outstanding all-around performance. He came to the notice of both his Captain and the Commander-in-Chief, and so gained by performance the friendship of authority which was necessary for advancement at that period. His often repeated lines, "I entered the Navy penniless, friendless, and forlorn. I have had to fight like hell, and fighting like hell has made me what I am," omits the fact that he stayed friendless a very short time, since he soon attracted notice and also was well liked by his contemporaries until

a much later period.¹ It will be noted that each job he held was a "plum" of the service of the time; in each he came to the attention of authority by his superior performance and so came to mind when selections were made for progressively more important posts.² For example, his performance at the Gunnery School in HMS EXCELLENT in 1860 was such that he was appointed gunnery lieutenant of the new WARRIOR, the first Royal Navy armored ship. An Admiral's diary in 1873 records the brilliant impression which Commander Fisher made in lecturing on torpedoes. He was presently promoted Captain and appointed as second in command of the gunnery school. Consistently fine performance, both as an administrator and seaman in the mast and yard era, together with an obvious talent for things technical, brought him in 1881 command of HMS INFLEXIBLE, then the largest and most complicated ship in the Navy. This was a genuine honor since he was still relatively junior on the list of captains.³

The purpose of this sketch has been to emphasize that Fisher did not spring forth full blown as a reformer. He was first of all an extremely competent all-around naval officer. It is a measure of this ability that he never served on half pay, except while on sick leave.

¹ Bacon, Fisher, Chap. II.

² Marder, Road to War, p. 15., and Memories and Records.

³ Bacon, Fisher, Chap. III; Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought.

That is, his services were always in demand over those of a number of other officers.⁴

B. The Navy 1860 - 1880. A few of the earlier reforms in the Navy have been briefly mentioned in the discussion of the Royal Navy in 1890. Aside from personnel reforms, and despite an ingrained conservatism that caused each step to take years, many technical advances had been incorporated in the ships as they became available. Iron and steel hulls were used for new construction of ships from the 60's on. Whitehead torpedoes, the ancestors of our own, had been adopted in the 70's, largely by the efforts of Fisher while attached to the gunnery and torpedo schools. Electricity appeared for interior lighting in the design of INFLEXIBLE in the late 70's, and had been used for search-lights before that. Turrets were introduced in the early 1860's, HMS CAPTAIN being the best known, but the only unsuccessful application of this principle of mounting armament.

The heterogeneity of ship design in this period has been mentioned; this was largely brought about by constant experiments with size, gun armament, armour protection, battery distribution and propulsion. If these experiments never led to a logical conclusion, it must still be remembered that the initiative was found to make them.⁵

⁴Ibid.

⁵Oscar Parkes, British Battleships.

In the administrative area, aside from the officer personnel reforms, there had been a few accomplishments. The Royal Dockyards came in for periodic overhauls, and had become capable of reasonable fleet support and construction of new ships at a fairly competitive cost. As stated in the discussion of 1890, there is considerable evidence that well intentioned men were doing their best. That this was a somewhat uninspired best overall should not slight the accomplishments of many individuals.

C. The Reformer Emerges - Fisher and the Navy, 1880 - 1890. In 1881, Captain Fisher first appeared a radical innovator, the role in which he was to achieve fame. Appointed to command HMS INFLEXIBLE, which has been mentioned as the largest and most complicated ship in the Navy, he viewed her unprecedented complexity as requiring a novel approach. She strongly resembled a modern ship in having a large number of watertight compartments, and much auxiliary machinery. All this was completely strange to personnel trained on ships without compartments and with hand worked guns and windlasses; the result was confusion below during general quarters. Fisher developed ideas such as colored compartment markings, very similar to what we use now, and concentrated his drills on such things as ammunition handling, watertight closures and gun loading. None of this could be seen from the outside, and the sail drill on her peacetime brig rig suffered. The resulting displeasure of the Commander-in-Chief alone would probably not have caused any

modification of this policy, but the morale of the crew suffered. Fisher, therefore, after completing his training for fighting the ship, shifted to sail drill with great success.⁶

I mention this incident for three reasons: First, it is Fisher's first appearance as a genuine originator, rather than as a highly effective performer; second, it shows the problems created by the overall atmosphere; third, it demonstrates Fisher's ability to adapt to a superior, when unable to convince or circumvent him; this last was important to his success in the future and is discussed further in the section on his personal qualities. (Chapter XII)

When in 1883 Fisher became Captain of HMS EXCELLENT, after distinguishing himself at the bombardment and capture of Alexandria in 1882, he completely changed the training routines, which had become many years behind the times, emphasizing smooth bore muzzle loaders and cutlass drills for the men. More important, he joined the agitation to transfer the Navy's weapons from the Army, who had supplied them since the 17th century. In 1884, the situation in regard to guns and ordnance of all sorts was chaotic. For example, the first breech loading main battery guns adopted as a consequence of the THUNDERER accident, were decided on in 1879. The complete design, despite the existence of

⁶Captain N. Penrose Fitzgerald RN, paper before the Royal United Institution. Quoted in Parkes, British Battleships, p. 257. Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers, contains the same story.

many foreign breech loading guns of heavy caliber, was not available until 1884. Numerous other instances, including serious delays in completion of new ships because of guns, indicated that the War Office was behind in ordnance design and not particularly concerned about the Navy requirements.⁷ Fisher was appointed Director of Naval Ordnance in 1886. He at once took up an inter-department committee report recommending the transfer of the Ordnance supply and design. By great persistence, he succeeded in keeping the committee report alive in its wanderings through government channels; a Cabinet decision was obtained and, although it took until 1889, the change was made. This enabled the building program of the 1890's to proceed in an orderly manner.⁸ Although the chief credit for this is normally given Fisher, it is worth noting that Briggs⁹ places it as one of the achievements of Mr. Forwood, a senior Admiralty civil servant, without mention of Fisher. Briggs' book was written about 1895 before any controversy arose; this episode is of interest in showing the gulf between the attitude of the civilian in the Admiralty and the naval officers. Since Fisher's efforts were noted and left on record by Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister of the day, and the maker of the

⁷Parkes, British Battleships, Chap. 45.

⁸Bacon, Fisher, pp. 101-3.

⁹Briggs, Naval Administration, p. 253.

ultimate decision it seems that Fisher was in fact the spearhead of this important step.

D. With Chapters IV and V as an introduction, we are ready to enter the more important section of the study. This is the 20 year period of Fisher's service as a Flag Officer, during which he gained world-wide note as a revolutionary reformer and created turmoil in the service by his methods.

The years of Fisher's greatest impact divide logically into two periods. First, 1890 to 1904, when he held a series of key appointments, began a number of his reforms and matured his "Scheme." This period forms Chapter VI. Second, 1904 to 1910, when, as First Sea Lord, he implemented the sweeping changes which required the powers of that office for accomplishment. This period is covered in Part II.

CHAPTER VI

ASCENT TO POWER - 1890-1904

A. Admiral Superintendent, Portsmouth Dockyard 1890-1892. Shortly after being promoted to Rear Admiral, Fisher was appointed Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard. The Royal Dockyards of that, or any, day were not noted for efficiency. The workers were permanent fixtures and there was little incentive towards efficiency or speed in shipbuilding. It was Fisher's view that such methods, which had been tolerated over a period of years, were tying up valuable plant capital and resulting in completion of ships already obsolete. He undertook the task of speeding up the building of HMS ROYAL SOVEREIGN. This ship went from launch to completion in 15 months under his supervision, which was two thirds of the corresponding time for other dockyard built ships of that class and substantially less than the best commercial yard time.¹ His basic approach, as stated by himself, was "...concentrating workmen on one ship like a hive of bees and adopting piece-work to the utmost limit."² That there was considerably more than just organization involved is illustrated by some of his typical methods of supervision. One important but chairbound official was informed that he could readily be made available to fill a vacancy in the dockyard in Ceylon. Thereafter,

¹Parkes, British Battleships, p. 355.

²Lord Fisher, Memories, p. 237.

he was never in his office and always at the building ways. Fisher took care to prime himself with the names of individual workmen when visiting the ship, so as to give a personal touch to his encouragement. Another battleship had a main battery gun replaced, an operation which he thought was inefficiently performed. He appeared the next time such a job was started and seated himself to watch. The normal pace accelerated; the visits of the Superintendent were normally short--however, as noon approached, a table was brought and lunch was served. Eventually the job was finished in four hours instead of the usual 2 days.³ As usual, his methods were drastic; the complaint arose that all the other work in the yard was being neglected. Again typically, he brushed aside these objections as brought up by men of no vision, although it seems logical that there might have been a basis for them.

B. Controller and Third Sea Lord, 1892-7. Fisher's next move was to the post at the Admiralty which carried the responsibility for coordinating the Royal Navy's ship design and construction as a whole. His five years in this post were important, both at the time and later.

Two important changes in the Navy were initiated by Fisher in this period; the first was the introduction of the sea-going destroyer. This type, designed with high speed and heavier gun armament than the

³Bacon, Fisher, p. 104-5.

torpedo boat, was proposed by Mr. Alfred Yarrow, a well known shipbuilder and designer. Fisher pushed the design, which was generally successful, and a large program was begun. In instituting this program, Yarrow's design was used as what would now be called a "contract design," or guide for other shipbuilders, without consulting the originator.⁴ This created quite a considerable fuss and Parliamentary inquiries were made, but the practice was insisted on as essential to Admiralty progress and efficiency. Fisher, as he usually did in such cases, took care to restore good relations with Yarrow, being well aware of the essential position of that firm.

The second major innovation was the water tube boiler. This development was the first "typical" Fisher push. The water tube boiler, in much the same form as it is now used, had just been developed, and was strongly advocated by the Engineer in Chief of the Navy. The advantages for naval purposes, light weight and flexibility at varying steaming rates, were obvious and Fisher seized on this development in 1894. There was serious Parliamentary opposition, partly instigated by those members whose constituents were heavily committed to building the other type of boiler. This became extremely acrimonious, but Fisher held on, as did his successors, and the boiler was adopted. There were charges that the development had been taken up prematurely, before satisfactory designs had been worked out. Extensive boiler repairs were required on

⁴Parkes, British Battleships, p. 377. Also Bacon, Fisher.

many of the early ships, which lent support to this contention. On the other hand, Fisher's reply was always to the effect that the necessary skills could never have developed had he not forced the pace.⁵ "Straining at the gnat of perfection while swallowing the camel of unreadiness" was his expression, often used in other similar situations.⁶

During this period also, Fisher was prominent in one of the periodic Navy scares, that of 1893. The First Lord, Lord Spencer, and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Frederick Richards, were both rather inarticulate, although determined. The Liberal government of the day, under Gladstone, refused to agree to the shipbuilding program considered essential by the Board of Admiralty. The Board, Fisher acting as the primary spokesman in the many meetings, refused to reduce the program and intended to resign in a body, which would have created a Parliamentary crisis. Eventually, the government backed down and agreed to present the program.⁷

These collisions with politicians caused many people in high public life to become greatly impressed with his personality and ability.⁸ This naturally affected his future. It was also the beginning of his life-long contempt for politicians. This was very marked indeed. He

⁵Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, pp. 108-9, Parkes, British Battleships.

⁶Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, p. 101.

⁷Ibid, p. 102.

⁸Marder, Road to War, p. 17.

described the liberal cabinet members in this instance as "frightened rabbits." His ability to draw the support of his superiors, which is discussed at greater length in Chapter XII, shows very clearly in this period. He served under Lord George Hamilton, Lord Spencer and Mr. Goschen as First Lords, and Admirals Hood, Hoskins and Richards as First Sea Lords. Their opinions of him and his of them were very high indeed. Since he did not, by any means, hold the power at this stage that he later did as First Sea Lord, the accomplishments of the period are clear evidence of his effectiveness in working with superiors.

It is amusing to note one minor item. HMS RENOWN was designed under his supervision as Controller. Despite the fact that much of his fame rested on the DREADNOUGHT design ten years later, RENOWN was considered a quite unsatisfactory fighting ship when completed. He used her for a flagship in the Mediterranean a few years later, but at whose instance is not recorded.

C. Interim. From 1897 to 1899, Fisher commanded the North American station and then acted as British Naval delegate to the Hague Peace Conference. There were no specific accomplishments in this period which are significant to this study. There are however, many anecdotes illustrative of his characteristics and methods. Many report his kindliness and consideration towards his more junior subordinates, his very high standards of performance, and his drastic action when an officer failed to meet his standard. At the Hague, he startled many by his strongly expressed views on preserving peace by making war too

horrible to contemplate. At the same time, he took a realistic view of the possibility of regulating war.⁹ He is quoted by Stead, one of the better known naval journalists, as having said in one session:

The humanizing of War! You might as well talk of humanizing Hell!...Moderation in war is imbecility.¹⁰

Fisher's thoughts were probably seldom as violent as his language, but this is a typical sample. Since he had been sent to the Conference to fight, his performance was considered effective. More important, however, he gained considerable insight into future German naval intentions.¹¹

D. 1899-1902 Mediterranean Command.¹² Immediately after the Hague Conference, Fisher assumed command of the Mediterranean Fleet; as mentioned earlier, this was the prize sea-going command of the Navy at the time. By now the service was accustomed to a whirlwind of energy whenever he took up a new appointment. In this case, there was relatively little he could do in the way of changing either ships or personnel. His efforts, energetic as usual, were directed towards anything which might improve the readiness of the fleet for war. A

⁹ Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, Chap. 3.

¹⁰ Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 121, quoting from Review of Reviews, February 1910.

¹¹ Lord Fisher, Records, p. 65.

¹² This period is covered extensively by almost all the sources. Only specific references are footnotes.

brief catalog of the accomplishments of the fleet under his command will serve to give some idea of the breadth of his approach. These fall into two categories--material/administration, and tactical/strategic.

Commencing as soon as he assumed command, Fisher entirely altered the maneuvers carried out. These were now carefully planned in advance, to evaluate definite ideas of strategy and combat tactics. The ideas were worked up by a committee composed not of a few of the senior flag officers, but of a few captains and a large number of commanders whom the Commander-in-Chief thought might contribute, and were tried in model form beforehand. Once the fleet could maneuver effectively, strategic schemes were tried, and finally joint maneuvers with the Channel Fleet. This was a far cry from the "steam tactics" of the past. A series of lectures were given to the officers of the Fleet by Fisher himself. The subjects read much like a war college curriculum. The effect of such a shift in orientation and increase in activity on the officers of the fleet was electrifying. The formation of the large body of younger officers who supported and implemented his changes with enthusiasm dates from this time.

In the individual ship area, the shift in emphasis was similar. He instituted what would now be called operational readiness inspections, during which every possible general drill was conducted in rapid succession to evaluate the state of training. By means of a series of long high speed runs he placed heavy demands on the engineering departments of the ships. "From a 12-knot fleet with numerous breakdowns, he made a

15-knot fleet without breakdowns," as Lord Charles Beresford wrote in his memoirs. The high interest in naval gunnery was just beginning in 1899, and Fisher insisted on the need for constant gunnery practice. He also instituted competition in gunnery and long range firing, on the theory that guns must be used at the ranges of which they were capable. At this point it is appropriate to mention that the individual usually considered originator of the gunnery revolution in the Navy was Captain Percy Scott, another individual of very strong personality and decided opinions. Scott had recently broken all records for gunnery by introducing his methods in two different cruisers. Fisher, as in so many other cases, grasped hold of an idea and made it effective by energetic and planned execution.

The methods used by Fisher are typical and are attested to by volumes of anecdotes and stories. A Commander-in-Chief's staff of the period consisted of no more than four officers, so the enormous amount of detailed staff work in this program was done by Fisher himself. His habit of rising at 4 AM caused some inconvenience but was one way of keeping ahead. There are accounts of officers who failed to measure up being removed from their stations and exiled to the far corners of the world.¹³ He took care, however, to indicate his approval of good work, such as by offering a prize for essays on tactics, and by giving a dinner for all the chief engineers of the fleet after a particularly

¹³ Bacon, Fisher.

successful full-power fun. The thread which runs through all the anecdotes is of an all-seeing eye who loosed thunderbolts when displeased. Smith¹⁴ mentions an occasion on which he was one of the few officers of the deck in the fleet not reprimanded by signal for some omission or other during one busy morning. However, despite the enormous volume of detailed supervision, his correspondence shows him to have been working constantly on such things as the founding of a naval war college, various maneuvers to get the readiness for war of the Admiralty as a whole improved, and changing the composition of the Mediterranean Fleet to suit his view of the tense strategic situation surrounding the Boer War. As everywhere in the correspondence, the germ of future decision is visible. In this instance, it is a stated need for fast ships built to outclass any cruiser, joined with an emphasis on the importance of speed in general.¹⁵ That he was maturing his views on the Navy at large in this period became clear when Lord Selborne, the First Lord, visited the fleet in 1901. The impression made by Fisher's presentation of his theories was apparently responsible for his later appointment as First Sea Lord.¹⁶ One other series of episodes is both illustrative of Fisher's inability to tolerate senior subordinates whom he suspected were not entirely loyal, and of significance to the future. They are

¹⁴H. H. Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers, p. 164.

¹⁵Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, Part 2, Chap. 1.

¹⁶Kemp. ed. Fisher's Papers, p. xv.

sometimes considered the beginning of his dispute with Admiral Lord Charles Beresford. As will be discussed more fully later, Beresford was an officer of unique character, well known and popular with the press. He was appointed as second in command of the Mediterranean half a year after Fisher took command. This event was followed by a number of press comments on Beresford's steps to reorganize and improve the efficiency of the fleet. This aroused in Fisher a deep suspicion that Beresford himself was feeding this view to the press. Although at this period Beresford acted as his subordinate with exemplary outward loyalty, there was considerable friction. The best known of several scenes took place when Beresford's flag-captain made a poor job of moving the flag-ship in the Grand Harbor of Malta. Fisher signalled, "Your flagship is to proceed to sea and come in again in a seamanlike manner,"¹⁷ a most unusual public rebuke to his senior subordinate. One other signal illustrates his habitual violence. Smith quotes this sequel to a drill:

The yeoman of signals of the _____ is to be immediately disgraced...
Sub-Lieutenant _____ is to be informed from me that on this occasion he seems merely to have acted the part of the harmless imbecile.

But despite these problems, he had fired the imagination of the younger officers and men and gained a loyal following which was important to the success of his later efforts.¹⁸

¹⁷Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers, p. 150.

¹⁸Marder, Road to War, p. 12.

It appears that by late 1901, Fisher believed that his consistent goading of the Admiralty had ended any possibility of further important posts. He expressed pleasure and some surprise when asked by Selborne to join the Board as Second Sea Lord in 1902.¹⁹ The Second Sea Lord was responsible for the personnel of the Navy as a whole. Fisher's interests in this field were officer procurement and the training and general living and working conditions of the "lower deck." In the action he took, he first began to have a strong impact on the Navy as a whole which affected each individual.

E. 1902-3 The Selborne Plan. Fisher's appointment as Second Sea Lord, had clearly resulted from Lord Selborne's wish to have Fisher's ideas put into effect and Fisher's own desire to implement it in person. As a full admiral he relieved a rear admiral in a billet which was normally held by an officer of that rank. The action taken seems logical to a modern view, but the situation in regard to officer sources discussed in Chapter IV must be kept in mind. Much of the controversy over them arose later when all the products of his reforms came under fire.

1. The Situation. As will be remembered from the review of the Navy in 1890 (Chapter IV), executive (line) officers were entered as Cadets at about 14 to 15, for about two years of training in a

¹⁹Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 155.

stationary training ship, and received the rest of their education at sea as midshipmen, until they became sub-lieutenants at about 20. The effect of very little education outside professional subjects from that age has been mentioned; in addition, the standards of selection of cadets were sufficiently rigid and competitive so that specialized preparatory schools ("Crammers") had come to be considered essential, just as they were in our own services in the '30s. The result was that these officers actually received almost no non-professional education above the elementary level. Furthermore, the experience of the "crammer" left them with a marked distaste for academics, which many never lost.

In 1896, an effort towards remedying this situation had been made by raising the age of entry and shortening the course. This, as Selborne found, encountered opposition from the schools, who did not wish to lose their best boys just when they were assuming positions of leadership. The decision had also been made to build a new training establishment ashore at Dartmouth, to provide better facilities. This was nearing completion in 1902. The training of the executive officers contained very limited indoctrination in engineering. The engineering officer's entry has been discussed in Chapter IV.

2. The Revised Officer Education. Fisher held firm views of long standing as to what was required. First, he deplored the system of "cramming" and the narrowly professional education, which he felt to be destructive of intellectual qualities. Second, and equally important, he believed that all officers should be trained in

engineering, and that engineers and executive officers should be drawn from the same source and trained alike.²⁰ His reasoning proceeded directly from the era of masts and yards--the ship in battle and the means of propulsion were one entity and must be learned as such. To us, accustomed to officers trained initially as engineers, this seems highly logical. A moment's reflection on the source and status of the engineers of that day will bring clearly to mind the enormity of such a change in 1902.

To achieve these ends, Fisher proposed a complete new entry system. Boys were to enter as cadets for all the branches at 12 to 13 and remain at the "college" for four years, receiving a general education, containing basic engineering. Their training would continue identical until they went to their sub-lieutenant's courses; thereafter they would specialize in the branches; the amalgamation of the branches was still some way in the future. He was unable to remedy the fact that to train an officer for the service still cost his parents about £ 1000, although he complained of the undesirability of the situation.²¹ As a step towards improving the motivation of the "lower deck," he requested Selborne to include a provision for appointment of 50 warrant officers a year as lieutenants.²²

²⁰ He also included Marine officers in this plan. This never attained the importance of the rest of the scheme and shortly disappeared.

²¹ Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 201.

²² Letters of Nov. 1, 1902, Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, p. 265.

The implementation of this scheme called for some rapid rearrangements because of the more than doubled number of cadets. The Naval College at Dartmouth was rushed to completion and used for the senior half. The other half was to be accommodated at a new naval college at Osborne, Queen Victoria's old summer residence, disused since her death in 1901. The construction of this establishment and the organization of a curriculum had to be carried out rapidly, since the first new cadets would enter in the summer of 1903. Fisher's methods showed his usual executive hustle. Selborne and Fisher²³ had recruited in January 1903 a well known engineering professor, J. A. Ewing, as Director of Naval Education. These three in turn recruited a headmaster for Osborne, Cyril Ashford, from Harrow, one of the best known British "Public" schools. This was a conspicuous example of Fisher's usual readiness to get the best expert help and to gain their support. Ewing and Ashford (with much guidance from Fisher for which there is documentary evidence) produced a curriculum which was extremely radical for those days. They recognized the need for a good mixture of humanities with science and engineering, to provide a sound general education, but provided the humanities by history, english and modern languages, rather than the classics which were generally considered the basis at that time.

²³ Selborne was by no means a figurehead in this activity. His interest in a solution to the problem had prompted his appointment of Fisher.

The Osborne plant was completed between March and August 1903, by a United States hotel contractor, whom Fisher discovered after being told by the Admiralty builders that the job would take three years.²⁴ The result shocked many, who complained it was unhealthy, but served the purpose until 1921 when Dartmouth and Osborne were consolidated. The first cadets reported at the end of August 1903.

The use of Osborne was obtained from King Edward VII, whom Fisher had known since the 1880's. This was an early example of King Edward's strong support of the Navy in general and Fisher in particular.

To supervise the initiation of the scheme, Fisher became Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, the naval command having control of the area, in September 1903. The School was headed by Captain R. E. Wemyss, afterward First Sea Lord (1918-19), who was well satisfied with the faculty and naval staff. It is interesting to note that Wemyss, who was an immensely wealthy officer of an old and aristocratic family, and who parted sharply from Fisher on another issue a few years later, was and remained an enthusiastic backer of the intent of the Selborne plan.²⁵

3. The Reaction and Effects. The initial reaction of both public and service was favorable.

²⁴ Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 203.

²⁵ Wemyss, Life and Letters, pp. 68-69.

The South African War had just ended, having revealed major deficiencies in all sections of the War Office and Army. Reform of the armed forces was therefore popular in general. There was considerable comment by the press on the magnitude and desirability of the changes.

Service reaction was generally based on an admission that a knowledge of his propulsion plant was as necessary to an officer as a knowledge of masts and sails had been, although not so valuable a training in quick decision and self-reliance for an officer. The best illustrations are the reactions of some senior officers who later disagreed violently with most of his policies. Wemyss has been mentioned. Beresford, who had been asked by a group to lead the opposition, stated in 1902:

The executive has remained ignorant of one of the most important parts of his profession, and the engineer has never received the recognition to which the importance of his duties and responsibilities entitle him.²⁶

Beresford could also write to Fisher that:

In 20 years time Naval officers will wonder how a steam Navy could possibly have been run...by an executive who knew nothing...of steam or machine appliances.²⁷

Admirals Sir Edward Seymour²⁸ and Sir Edmund Freemantle²⁹ approved the

²⁶Excerpt from press interview quoted in entirety in Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, pp. 221-23.

²⁷Letter of Beresford, April 1903. Quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 30.

²⁸Seymour, My Naval Career and Travels. Both Freemantle and Seymour were conspicuous in opposing Fisher in 1907-10. See Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2, p. 2.

²⁹Freemantle, The Navy as I Have Known it.

scheme, the latter quoting Drake, "...the gentlemen to haul and draw with the mariners." Even his later enemy, Admiral Sir Reginald Custance³⁰ concurred. Opposition grew gradually, receiving impetus from the agitation over the rest of the Fisher policies, becoming most vocal in 1906 when Fisher proposed to remove all distinction of rank, title and uniform between the two branches.

The loudest reaction was social; this would not be worth discussion except that it was an important point at the time; it enraged Fisher and provoked him to violent reply which did little to quiet the strife. The social reaction was from three sources. First, Naval officers did not wish to have the executive branch mixed with their social inferiors; most would not admit this, but would state that parents would not send their sons into the Navy if they were to be trained as "mechanics" or associate with those who were.³¹ Secondly, there were indeed families and others in influential social circles who felt this way, and feared that their sons and friends might be assigned as engineers.³² Fisher's volcanic reaction to this is seen in his correspondence for the period.³³ His description of "all the armies of blue blood and society" ranged

³⁰Letter of June 1907, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2, p. 110.

³¹Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 199.

³²Wemyss to Fisher, no date, quoted in Marder, Road to War, Vol. 1, p. 47.

³³Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, Part 2.

against him is amusing.

More reasonable (to our eyes) opposition came from some senior officers and from experienced and respected administrators like Goschen.³⁴ The main basis was that adequate training could not be given in both engineering and the line functions, and that the officers would have to specialize to be reasonably profound. They held that increased specialization was required by the increasing complication of the ships and machinery, rather than increased generalization.

The merits of the plan overall may be evaluated easily. First, common training and engineering proficiency had been since 1899, and remains, the U. S. policy. It has been reasonably successful. Second, the Fisher scheme exists today in the Royal Navy, substantially as he proposed it. As Jameson³⁵ puts it, "...opposition bulldozed underground during Fisher's years of power, remained alive." After a series of vicissitudes, including several swings of the pendulum both ways, common entry and rank for engineering officers again became a fixture in 1954; The Dartmouth Curriculum, though now shorter, remains based on the same principle; fees at Dartmouth were abolished entirely in 1947, after many years of reduction.

³⁴First Lord 1895-1900.

³⁵William Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built.

F. Portsmouth - Sidelights. While Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, Fisher was involved in three relatively minor works of importance, either then or in the future.

In very early 1904, he was appointed, apparently at the instance of King Edward, to a three member committee of which Lord Esher was chairman, on the reorganization of the War Office. This committee was a product of the desire for thorough reorganization following the South African War. This unusual assignment was an evident tribute to Fisher's recognized ability as an administrator and innovator. Two things emerged from this committee which foreshadowed Fisher's methods as First Sea Lord. First, he carefully kept the other members in the forefront, recognizing that this was the only way to get any acceptance by the Army, since he held no authority. Second, he observed the effectiveness of Lord Esher's insistence on instant execution of approved recommendations.³⁶ This gave little time for organized doubt until the scheme had at least been tried.

As Commander-in-Chief, he had under his command the First Submarine Flotilla, attached for coast defense purposes. He became a strong supporter of this type of ship after experience of the effectiveness of this weapon in maneuvers and was also impressed by the senior officer of the infant force, Captain Reginald Bacon.

³⁶Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 210, ff.

Fisher also worked closely with W. H. Gard, the chief constructor of the dockyard at Portsmouth. Since he was in the midst of putting together "The Scheme," the next series of reforms to be discussed, he needed skilled help in making the sketch designs for his all-big-gun ships. Gard provided a convert to the Fisher gospel in the Corps of Naval Constructors also, which was important in the future of the designs.

G. During his time as Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, Fisher was well aware he was to be the next First Sea Lord, and was preparing his plans in detail.

Until now, he had been presented with opportunities for overhauling individual elements of the naval establishment. First the Gunnery School, then the Ordnance establishment, then the Portsmouth Dockyard, the ship-building program, the Mediterranean Fleet and finally the personnel of the Navy had felt his innovation, and executive and administrative drive toward efficiency. Now he was coming to a post which would permit him to grasp every side of the Navy and bring it into conformance with his own ideas of the requirements of one objective: "The strength of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war." As he worked toward this objective, he constantly strove to increase efficiency at all levels so as to cut costs and gain more strength for the same or less funds. Part II deals with his methods, accomplishments and problems in this broader area.

PART II

FIRST SEA LORD - 1904-1910

Introductory Note

Bacon,¹ in introducing the portion of his book on Fisher's period as First Sea Lord, says it is impossible to deal chronologically with the many activities. Jameson² stays closely chronological; Marder³ adopts a scheme which is chronological, but follows main threads to their conclusions in the narrative with the correspondence, and a less chronological and more subjective approach in The Road to War. Granted complete liberty of action by this disagreement among authorities, the writer has elected to first deal with the enlisted personnel reforms, which were initiated by Fisher as Second Sea Lord and continued through his administration. Next, the "Scheme" as presented in 1904, which comprised the nucleus crew proposals, the scrapping of obsolete warships, and the distribution of the Fleet, will be discussed, including the main objections raised in succeeding years. The "Dreadnought" design series follows in the same format. Brief notice will then be taken of a number of reforms accomplished under Fisher which were not

¹Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 225.

²Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built.

³Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought.

seriously opposed, which were very definitely of a management nature, and are of somewhat more importance than Bacon's "minor" classification would imply. Thereafter, the most important of the controversies which arose are covered in a little more detail than could conveniently be fitted in the chapters on specific reforms. An amplificatory discussion of Fisher's personality and working methods, bringing out a few points only implied earlier, completes this part of the study.

CHAPTER VII

THE "LOWER DECK"

Fisher was most popular with the enlisted personnel of the Navy throughout his career. His colorful personality, force and obvious competence captured their imagination, but more than that, when he attained the position to do so, he instigated a series of changes which provided the skilled and highly motivated personnel who manned the ships in World War I.

While Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, he made changes in the system which reduced the time consumed in training gunnery personnel and improved the effectiveness.¹ Thereafter, as Second Sea Lord, and after 1904, as First Sea Lord, he pursued the welfare and training of the men by means of committees of younger officers, who investigated and recommended a wide range of changes.

In the training sphere, the schools of signalling and gunnery were reorganized. The training of engineering ratings was completely reorganized. Rather than recruiting artificers at high ratings from ashore, a system of training young new entry men as artificers, and bringing them up through the grades was introduced. The stokers branch was drawn on for men who could be trained for warrant rank and engine room artificers and stokers were provided with a path to warrant,

¹Chatfield, The Navy and Defense.

and eventually commissioned, rank. This provided an orderly uniform structure where each could see a road to advancement. The effect on the engineering branch was highly beneficial in both motivation and discipline. The program begun as part of the Selborne scheme, promotions of warrant officers to lieutenant, was continued. This opening of the road to advancement made recruitment of intelligent men easier, and so made training of men to operate the complex equipment being introduced less difficult.

The welfare area came in for considerable attention. Various pay practices of an arbitrary nature were stopped. For example, the allowances of men going to foreign stations were checked for a period of one or two months so that the Treasury would not be short if the man was killed and the news did not reach home promptly,² a holdover from the years before cable communication. This, of course, was a hardship which fell entirely on the families of the men, and was changed in 1905.

Matters of uniform, messing arrangements, food rations, cooking, and berthing received equally thorough overhauling during Fisher's time as First Sea Lord, a process continued by Churchill in 1910 and 1911 as First Lord. The sailor got his knife and fork in 1904. This was a period of great public interest in welfare in general in England, and the Navy's emergence from the dark ages aroused enthusiasm.

² Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 2, p. 13.

One of the important changes which reflected a consciousness of the changing human material was the modification of the Naval Discipline Act in 1907, which brought the system of punishments and regulations up to date.

None of these steps aroused any serious controversy, although the craft unions which had supplied the engine room ratings were not pleased by the training program. By the time he left office in 1909, Fisher could write with accuracy:

What has passed unobserved is what I am most happy about during my years at the Admiralty in what has been done for the Lower Deck and I was looking forward to still more.³

A definite improvement in enlisted morale stemmed from the Fisher era, which was important in the performance of 1914. An excellent indicator is found in Smith's account of the contrast between the amount of unauthorized absence in 1891 and 1913,⁴ which amounted to a 90% reduction.

³Letter of June 1909. Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2., p. 22. The punctuation of the quotation is as given.

⁴Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCHEME¹

A. Introductory. "The Scheme," which survives in its initial and final forms in the Fisher Papers, was presented to Lord Selborne and the Board as soon as Fisher took office in 1904. Although Selborne had written to him earlier in 1904, Fisher declined to reveal his plans until he took office in October. "The Scheme," however, was substantially complete.²

This blueprint for action had been worked up by Fisher with the assistance of a number of younger officers, such as Bacon, who formed a "committee of five" to review the proposals. It comprised three major reforms: the nucleus crew plan, the scrapping plan, and the redistribution plan, all of which were closely interdependent. It also included recommendations on the characteristics of future fighting ships. The most important of these recommendations were for a battleship and an armored cruiser of revolutionary type. After the modifications of the committee on designs, they became the Dreadnought and battle cruiser.

"The Scheme" was first gone over, at Fisher's insistence, by the First Lord, then by members of the Board. This is typical of Fisher's

¹P. K. Kemp (ed.), The Fisher Papers, Vol. I is the primary source for this chapter.

²Correspondence of July and August 1904. Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. I, pp. 320-21.

use of committees, to lend weight to his conclusions and to preserve a sense of participation. Fisher himself nominated the committee which worked with him originally. It included Jackson, Jellicoe, Bacon, Madden, and Henderson, who all became Admirals or Admirals of the Fleet, as well as Gard mentioned earlier and Alexander Gracie of Fairfield, a shipbuilder. This group elaborated the original paper into an immensely detailed presentation for the consideration of the Board.

There was no doubt from the first what the policy of the Board of Admiralty was to be, although Fisher was careful to ensure the other members were cooperative. A quotation illustrates the language of the scheme and his views as to changes:

So we must have no tinkering! No pandering to sentiment! No regard for susceptibilities! No pity for anyone! We must be ruthless, relentless and remorseless! And we must have The Scheme! The Whole Scheme!! And Nothing But The Scheme!!!³

B. The Nucleus Crew Proposal.⁴ Those ships not in commission and required for service were, in 1904, organized as the Fleet Reserve and the Dockyard Reserve. The Fleet Reserve, the larger part, was composed of ships ready for service from a material point of view, while the Dockyard Reserve were very old ships or those undergoing major repairs. The Fleet Reserve ships had small "care and maintenance" parties attached

³Introductory notes by Fisher. Fisher Papers, p. 19.

⁴Primary sources, Fisher Papers and Marder, Anatomy of British Sea Power.

to keep them in efficient operating condition, and were counted as part of the force available for war.

Since 1889, occasional mobilizations of the reserve for maneuvers had revealed important deficiencies. First, because of the number of personnel absorbed by the growing fleet, the care and maintenance parties had never been sufficient to do an effective job. Second, and more important, the ships were manned at mobilization by crews from the Naval Barracks, schools and reserve personnel, who were entirely unfamiliar with the ships and largely unfamiliar with their jobs. Maneuvers had shown the gunnery of these ships to be very inferior; their engineering performance was also bad.

The change proposed was to purify the Fleet Reserve by removal of some ships which were not up to standard, and manning the Fleet Reserve with two-fifths of their normal complement, including "all the specialists." In 1905, this meant engineers and a few gunnery and ship repair ratings. A crew of this size would ensure proper maintenance, would be able to take the ships to sea for limited periods, carry out limited gunnery firings, and form a trained core for the ships company on mobilization.

This proposal was a rather sweeping change in the methods of the Navy, and obviously would increase the efficiency of the reserve. A most significant point is brought out in the original proposal itself:

No more men above our present requirements need be entered, training in gunnery and torpedo schools need not be interfered and a saving

to the taxpayer effected.⁵

Successful accomplishment of this feat naturally required much more efficient use of personnel. This increased efficiency was to be attained by reducing the number of ships in full commission, scrapping many of the ancient reserve ships requiring maintenance, the redistribution of the fleet and elimination of small ships on foreign stations. The basis was elimination of ships not effective for war purposes. The scrapping and redistribution policies are discussed in detail later; they are mentioned here because of the integrated nature of the entire "Scheme." Before leaving the "Fisher Papers" discussion of the nucleus crew scheme, another point in personnel management is of interest. The detailed calculations indicated that the extra enlisted men provided by the proposed fleet changes would be absorbed shortly by the nucleus crews and new construction, but that there would be a surplus of officers. This is logical, since small ships have always carried a greater proportion of officers. The difference was more marked in 1904. Fisher's comment:

This will materially assist in the establishment of the principle so necessary to efficiency of having large lists to select from instead of having to employ anybody we possess, whether good or bad, in order to man our ships.

Objectively, the nucleus crew scheme seems to have been successful in a large degree. Those who were part of the service at the time

⁵Fisher Papers, pp. 47-8.

generally viewed it with favor as an overall improvement in readiness. There are numerous comments on the amount of hard work involved for the nucleus crews themselves, which are undoubtedly correct if our own experiences in short-handed ships after World War II are any gauge.

Smith comments:

It taught both the officers and men of the Royal Navy that they could do far more work than they had previously considered within their capabilities.⁶

Naturally, there was considerable pressure from on high to be sure that the nucleus crew ships were efficient. The plan continued until the First World War substantially unmodified and was part of that mobilization.

There were a number of charges levelled at the scheme, primarily by those who could not agree that an efficient nucleus crew battleship was worth the sacrifice of a "protected" cruiser in commission.⁷ The efficiency of the nucleus crew ships was the primary target.

By 1906, Balfour⁸ stated that the nucleus crew policy had "augmented the fighting power of the British Fleet not once or twice, but threefold." However, in 1906, the step was taken of counting the nucleus crew ships as a primary part of the new "Home Fleet," which provided the defense

⁶Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers, p. 203.

⁷A "protected" cruiser was something of the type of HMS BRILLANT, built in 1893, 314 ft. long, 3400 tons and about 18 knots speed. She was still in existence in 1919 and is an example of the more effective ships of the class.

⁸A. J. Balfour, quotation in Marder, Road to War, p. 38.

of the British Isles when the Channel Fleet was absent, as is discussed later. Beresford, by then in command of the Channel Fleet, characterized it as "a fraud upon the public and a danger to the empire," and stated that Germany could "inflict most crushing reverses...in the present totally unprepared state of the Home and Channel Fleets..."⁹ The effort to attain maximum readiness without expanding personnel had been carried beyond the point where it was considered safe by many critics.

It is somewhat difficult to discuss the three elements of the "Scheme" individually. Some of the arguments over those elements are not clearly related to any individual measure. However, an effort has been made to distribute the arguments throughout the chapter in a logical association, and to deal with those not clearly associated in a later chapter.

C. Scrapping Policy. As mentioned earlier, to make better use of personnel, it was essential to employ them in the most efficient manner. This did not include their use in small gunboats on police duties "able neither to fight nor run away."¹⁰ Aside from the gunboats, in Fisher's view, Third Class Cruisers could be replaced on distant stations at the rate of 2 or 3 to 1 by First Class Cruisers, effecting further economies. Fisher's concern was two-fold. He wished to utilize the

⁹ Beresford letters to the Admiralty, quoted in Marder, Road to War, pp. 91-2.

¹⁰ Marder, Anatomy of British Sea Power.

personnel for the nucleus crews, but he also feared the loss of large numbers of trained personnel at the outbreak of war, if these weak and scattered ships were attacked by modern enemy ships. He also firmly pointed out the loss of training involved in having men attached to small isolated units, a problem by no means solved even today.

A second group of ships which he attacked were the Dockyard Reserve. Many of these were immensely old, since the concept of the life of a ship in the days of "wooden walls," when fifty years was normal, still held. For example, MONARCH, laid down in 1866, was still on the Navy List; she had even completed extensive rebuilding and re-engineing in 1897. Her armament remained the same muzzle loading guns. Parkes mentions that there were thirty-eight ships with muzzle loading guns still on the List in 1903.¹¹ Fisher contended, with evident justice, that these ships cost money in minor repairs and berthing space, even when the Admiralty did not succumb to the temptation to "modernize" them. As mentioned in the discussion of the Navy in 1890, this modernization continued until Fisher's time as Controller and was often very extensive. MONARCH had been fitted with modern triple expansion engines which enabled her to make 3/4 of a knot more than when new, while her fighting capabilities, that is her armament and armor, were totally obsolete. It is difficult for us to understand the reasoning which led

¹¹Parkes, British Battleships, p. 135.

to such action, until we consider that most officials outside the Navy had no idea of the changes which had taken place in technology and remembered only that Nelson's VICTORY had been fifty years old at Trafalgar.

The proposed remedy was simple in the extreme.¹² The "Scheme" contained a listing of "bonafide fighting vessels," and three other lists: "of doubtful value" "utterly useless for fighting purposes" and "absolutely obsolete." There were 130 ships in the first, and 278 ships in the last three categories. Various dispositions were proposed for the latter categories, including use for subsidiary purposes, but the whole 278 were to be removed from the Navy List, and the vast majority sold or scrapped. This scheme was worked out in great detail including provisions for the various subsidiary jobs, such as fishery protection, surveying, training, by a variety of means. The basic principle was stated in the comment on ship types:

Small mercantile vessels, furnished with a Maxim gun, a white ensign, and a retired naval officer will be enough for the consuls and peace police duties.¹³

There was to be no new construction except battleships, heavy armored cruisers, destroyers and submarines, all except the last being of superior armament and speed to anything yet seen.

Fred T. Jane,¹⁴ the founder and editor of the well known reference

¹² Fisher Papers, pp. 13-15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴ Fred T. Jane, All the World's Fighting Ships, Edition of 1901, 1903.

book, had been abetting this proposal for several years, by omitting most of the obsolete ships and listing the old and small patrol vessels as "of no fighting value." This was an effort by an ardent navy "booster" to accustom the public to the idea that an enormous Navy List did not necessarily mean great power.

Lord Selborne and the Board demurred somewhat and some of the old battleships--"of great value after Armageddon"^{14A}--were retained as a second line. A number of small cruisers were retained also pending the completion of armored cruisers. Eventually, a total of 154 ships were removed from the Navy List in one sweep.

When this portion of the scheme became public, it raised the first major public outcry against the Fisher administration, extending through 1906 and 1907 until submerged in some of the later controversies. The arguments fell into several categories.

First, the Foreign and Colonial Offices felt that the disappearance of the numbers of small warships did damage to the world-wide interests of the empire. They did not consider the substitution of "an armored cruiser squadron at the end of a telegraph wire for a gunboat under the consul's window"¹⁵ a proper trade. The fact that in the Jamaica earthquake of 1907, U. S. warships were first on the scene, and some similar episodes, were seized on by a portion of the press and the public, with

^{14A} A marginal note by Selborne in Fisher Papers.

¹⁵ Fisher Papers, p. 38.

the support of the Foreign and Colonial Offices as a "national disgrace." There is little doubt that this opposition arose from a reluctance to accept the change of role of the Navy from police force to a combatant force aligned against the principal enemy. Fisher's reaction was scathing, and history bears him out.

A large number of naval officers had other criticism, however. One was lack of ships to protect the trade routes. Fisher proposed to do this in war time by powerful squadrons which could "lick up the enemy cruisers like armadillos in an ant hill." He also held the view that commerce raiding in the future would be by powerful squadrons. In this point of view he proved to be substantially correct until the submarine emerged, which was not foreseen until just before 1914. The damage done by German surface raiders, while spectacular, was unimportant. However, it was contended by a number of officers that light, or protected, as they were then called, cruisers were needed for fleet duties of scouting and patrol. It was also contended that large numbers of auxiliary and support ships would be needed in time of war. Fisher's view was that destroyers could do the scouting and patrolling and that the subsidiary duties were of no importance. In both of these contentions he proved quite wrong, although the policy as originally stated held throughout his administration. All the building programs after he left office contained light cruisers in some numbers but World War I still found these ships chronically short.

The main proponents of the opposite point of view in the professional

ranks were Admirals Bridge, Custance and Richards. All of these officers had held high posts at the Admiralty, and all incurred Fisher's undying enmity. His correspondence and the quotations on the subject are acid.

The scrapping policy has been covered in a certain amount of detail as it illustrates Fisher's sweeping methods and refusal to retreat from a point of view that was in his opinion correct. He said of the four types to be built, "No other type of vessel is required for fighting purposes,"¹⁶ and this remained Admiralty policy until he left office.

It was, as mentioned earlier the first of the Fisher reforms to provoke a real storm of criticism, both within and without the Navy. His reaction to the criticism, as evidenced by his correspondence, was violent.

D. Fleet Distribution.¹⁷ The Fleet in 1904 remained deployed substantially as in 1890; the main combatant strength was in the Mediterranean, and battleships were kept on the foreign stations in substantial quantities. However, the strategic picture had changed sharply over the intervening years. Instead of France being the second naval power in the world and the most likely enemy, Germany had assumed this position. The Asiatic alignment had been sharply changed by the Japanese alliance. Russia remained a vague menace for a few more years,

¹⁶Fisher Papers, p. 29.

¹⁷Marder, Anatomy of British Sea Power, primary source.

but the problem had been considerably lessened by the "Entente" with France.

The rise of Germany as a menace had been widely publicized and noted in the few years since the German Navy had been building up strength. First, there was a substantial commercial rivalry, particularly overseas. Second, the German Navy was attaining a strength which could have no other object than challenging British control in the North Sea. Third, Wilhelm II, notorious for his diplomatic indiscretions, had left no one in any doubt of German feelings on the occasion of the Boer War which had just ended. All of these developments had taken place in a glare of publicity on both sides, parliamentary and press, which was of a belligerent nature difficult to comprehend today when a general war is so universally feared. The naval writers, mentioned earlier, were none of them backward in pointing at Germany although official cabinet policy remained steadfastly conciliatory. A collision was, by 1910, regarded as inevitable in the Royal Navy and the German Fleet.

Fisher had clearly recognized the menace by 1900. His suspicion of the Germans was extreme. He was in full sympathy with an article written by Arnold White, a well known naval writer, in 1904 urging "Copenhagening," meaning a preventive attack on the German Fleet. Fisher himself is reliably reported to have made such a proposal to King Edward on at least one occasion, although how seriously he meant it is questioned.¹⁸

¹⁸

Marder, Anatomy of British Sea Power, p. 99.

The King's reply is reported to have been, "Fisher, you're Mad!"¹⁹

Under the circumstances a concentration of the fleet in home waters was an obvious step. This became a keystone of Admiralty policy until World War I, although care was taken to make the moves somewhat gradual, so as to give Germany no official grounds for complaint. The first step, in late 1904, reinforced the Home Fleet from eight to twelve battleships. It was renamed the Channel Fleet, which historically implied a cruising and possibly offensive role, and based in Dover and Portland. The eight ships of the old Channel Fleet, renamed the Atlantic Fleet, were replaced by the most modern available and based on Gibraltar so as to be readily available in either the Atlantic or Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Fleet was reduced to eight battleships, despite doubts as to Russia's conduct in the Russo-Japanese War and the obligations of Anglo-Japanese Treaty in case of intervention by a third party. These were made more acute by the famous Russian error of firing on the British fishing fleet on the Dogger Bank in 1904. In 1905, further concentration in home waters was effected by bringing in the five battleships from the China station, and consolidating the other distant stations with a view to making their ships more effective for war.

Thus far, the only objections had arisen from much the same origins as those discussed under the scrapping scheme: the reduced "police force" available at once world-wide. This outcry has been fairly comprehensively discussed under that heading. In 1907, however, a development took place

¹⁹Bacon, Fisher, Vol. II, p. 75.

in the controversy which is interesting; it was a reaction against economy, in the shape of the nucleus crew ships place in the fleet, on the grounds that security was being jeopardized.

In late 1906, a further step in concentration in home waters had been taken. A new Home Fleet was formed of one fully manned division of six ships drawn from the other three main fleets, and two nucleus crew divisions. These nucleus crew divisions were manned with three-fifths crews, rather than two-fifths; a slight reduction in the number of ships in full commission was required to do this. The Atlantic Fleet base was shifted to Berehaven in western Ireland. The Channel Fleet base was shifted from Dover westward to Portland on the south coast. The fully manned division of the Home Fleet was based on the Nore, at the mouth of the Thames, with the nucleus crew divisions at Portsmouth and Devonport on the south coast. The motive was sound. The most effective and yet flexible concentration could be made without drawing attention, since the two extreme "wings" were fairly close together, at the Nore and Berehaven. The best use could be made of the nucleus crew ships, proven by two years' experience to be effective, since they were now part of the combatant fleet. Logistics were made easier and the ships were removed from Dover, considered highly vulnerable to surprise attack and a poor harbor. In Fisher's view, the effectiveness of the Fleet had been enhanced with a reduction in cost.

He had not foreseen, or disregarded, the general fear of Germany which had grown up. As Marder says, "The din of protest...was ear shattering." The basis was originally the inability of the Home Fleet

to stave off a German attack if one should come in the absence of the Channel Fleet at sea in the Atlantic. The fact that the Dreadnoughts were being assigned to the Nore division as completed, passed more or less unnoticed.

Quite shortly the whole storm became one with the arguments over the scrapping policy; it had not died down before the Naval Scare of 1909 began.

Many of the charges levelled against Fisher's efforts toward economizing while building strength which have been discussed in this chapter are well summarized in the following paragraph, from a letter from Lord Hardinge, then in the Foreign Office:²⁰

It is perfectly childish to expect sane people to believe that ships with nucleus crews lying in home ports can be regarded as efficient items in a fleet, and he has failed to prove that the reductions in our fleets in commission have not reduced our fighting strength. Also, it can hardly be denied that the ships available for police duties abroad will suffer for the sake of concentration in the channel against a possible attack by Germany which even Fisher regards as a very remote eventuality. The only explanation of the scheme is economy and Fisher's desire to truckle to the Liberal Party.

The illogicalities present in this letter are typical of statements which provoked Fisher to violent outbursts in letters and sometimes in public.

E. "The Scheme" also included suggested ship types, whose characteristics were given in general terms. The development of these types,

²⁰ Marder, Road to War, p. 73.

Fisher's best-remembered innovation, was pursued concurrently with the other changes. The detailed design proposals did not form part of the original document, although usually considered part of the "Scheme." These designs are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX

THE DREADNOUGHT DESIGN SERIES¹

A. First Proposals. The most important of the general proposals for new designs was for a battleship of increased size and speed, with a uniform large caliber gun armament and having a number of other novel features. This was accompanied by a proposal for an armored cruiser of high speed, larger than the battleship, and also carrying a heavy uniform armament. The destroyer to accompany these ships was an equivalent advance, being 5 knots faster, 50 feet longer and 75% larger in displacement than previous ships of this type.² The destroyer had emerged from the torpedo boat type during Fisher's time as Controller, as mentioned earlier.

All these proposals had certain things in common; they were larger, faster, and more heavily gunned than their foreign equivalents. Fisher wanted to adopt oil fuel for all, because of the well known advantages in efficiency, stowage and reduction of personnel. He was unable to do this except in the destroyers because there was no assured supply of oil for the fleet in wartime. The attitude in 1905 towards oil fuel is interestingly pointed out by one of Lord Selborne's marginal notes,³

¹Kemp, Fisher Papers; Parkes, British Battleships, main sources.

²H. M. LeFleming, Warships of World War I.

³Kemp, op. cit., p. 81.

The substitution of oil for coal is impossible because oil does not exist in the world in sufficient quantities. It must be reckoned only as a most valuable adjunct.

In the end, the heavy ships were equipped with mixed firing, so that they could use either or both, while the destroyers burned oil.

B. "DREADNOUGHT." The origin of the all big-gun battleship is a fascinating study which has produced a number of full length papers in itself. It is sufficient to say here that the concept did not spring full blown from Fisher's mind. His experiences with his gunnery trials in the Mediterranean, and considerations of the requirements of war, as opposed to peacetime gunnery practice, had convinced him of the difficulties of controlling the fire of a mixed caliber armament. In the 1903 edition of Janes',⁴ to which the writer was led by Parkes' reference, Cuniberti, a well known Italian warship designer, proposed an all big-gun battleship of 29 knot speed as "the ideal ship for the British Navy." The United States in 1904 had designed the Michigan class with an armament of eight 12-inch guns,⁵ but quite moderate size and speed.

The original proposal mentioned alternatives between 10-inch guns, of which more could be carried and which had a higher rate of fire, and the 12-inch. The Russo-Japanese War, the observers' reports of which became available in the summer of 1905, produced two important inputs to the problem. It confirmed the effectiveness of the 12-inch gun, and

⁴Fred T. Jane, All The World's Fighting Ships, 1903 edition.

⁵Parkes, British Battleships, p. 467.

the probability of long range action. The Japanese secondary armaments, their battleships being equipped with 12-inch, 8-inch and 6-inch guns, did not come into effective action until the Russian Fleet was on its way to defeat. The major damage was done by the 12-inch shells.

This settled the argument in Fisher's mind, and on his taking over the Admiralty, he set a particularly notable committee to work on the design. This committee was appointed by the Board of Admiralty. Its membership was deliberately chosen to represent a cross section of the Admiralty and the shipbuilding industry and to be sufficiently illustrious to set possible criticisms at rest.⁶ This committee is an excellent example of a practice which Fisher frequently adopted; examples are the Selborne plan, the Engineering officer changes, and so forth. It is some evidence both of his personal charm and magnetism when he wanted to exert it, the force of his reasoning and presentation, the awe in which he was held by naval officers, and his ability to get important civilians to do as he wished, that there is no record of a committee he formed coming to a conclusion other than that which he intended to be attained, with detailed support for the position.

Although many of the members had more detailed ideas and knowledge already, the precept given the committee was in substance only the following:

⁶Membership listed in Appendix II.

Battleship: 21 knots speed, 12-inch guns and anti-torpedo craft guns. No intermediate armament and as many 12-inch as possible. Adequate armor. To be able to use the 4 larger drydocks.

Armored Cruiser: 25 knots speed. Same armament, but 12-inch guns to be reduced in number as necessary to keep the size within reasonable limits.⁷

The deliberations of the committee are most interesting reading.

They were carried out in great detail, and include as appendices detailed tactical studies as to the employment of a ship such as those under consideration. They resulted in DREADNOUGHT, discussed hereunder, and INVINCIBLE, discussed below in Section C. The destroyer designs mentioned earlier were also considered by this committee.

The revolutionary nature of the resulting battleship is best understood by comparing the design of the KING EDWARD VII class then completing, which was considered the best standard battleship design in the world at that time:⁸

<u>KING EDWARD VII</u>	<u>DREADNOUGHT</u>
Displacement: 17,009 (max. load)	21,845 tons (max. load)
Size: 425' long, 78' beam, 27' draft	490' long, 82' beam, 27' draft
Guns: 4-12", 4-9.2", 10-6", 14-12 pdr (3 inch) 14-3 pdr	10-12", 27-12 pdr (3 inch)
Armor: 9" side, 12" turrets	11" side, 11" turrets

⁷Fisher Papers, p. 201.

⁸Parkes, British Battleships.

KING EDWARD VIIDREADNOUGHT

Engines: Triple expansion,
reciprocating
2 shafts

Turbine, 4 shafts

Speed: 18 knots with 18,000 hp.

21 knots with 23,000 hp.

Cost:⁹ £ 1,473,245

£ 1,797,497

It is readily apparent from this table that every major characteristic of the ship was a major breakthrough. In addition, there were many other changes, such as much more watertight sub-division, anti-torpedo protection, radically different hull lines, and the most careful and detailed measures to reduce unnecessary weight and size. She embodied, we can see from 1964, the features which marked every superior design of the rest of the battleship era; higher speed, heavier main armament, equal or superior protection, and a secondary armament only sufficient to deal with the principal secondary enemy of the period.¹⁰

The design proved eminently sound. The only change required until 1914, in a period of very rapid development, was the increase, with the increase in size of destroyers and range of torpedoes, of the secondary battery, first to 4" and then to 6" guns. Size increased as necessary to accommodate progressively increasing main battery gun caliber.

Since details could obviously not be kept secret long, in order to make use of such a radical increase in fighting power, it was essential

⁹Fisher Papers, p. 341.

¹⁰e.g., IOWA, YAMATO classes. BISMARCK carried a secondary battery of 6" guns which served only to reduce her AA battery below desirable limits.

that the prototype be rushed to completion and tested so that other nations could not gain an advantage in numbers. Thereafter, the capacity of the shipbuilding industry and the budget would suffice. DREADNOUGHT was completed in one year or just over one-third the normal time. This was done by radical management methods coordinated by Fisher himself. These are interesting in themselves and sound very contemporary; two will suffice for illustration: The main battery guns and mountings for two pre-dreadnought ships under construction were appropriated. Material was ordered from the steel mills in sizes and thicknesses required, rather than being stocked and then sorted and cut in the yard.

Her trials were eminently successful. It is noticeable that, as has often happened with radical ships, her few minor problems were remedied with the least possible notice to the service or the public; while she was indeed a successful ship, good care was taken that she should appear so.¹¹

After the ship was completed in 1906, there was a large amount of criticism, as might be expected of any such radical change introduced under the aegis of one man in such a short time.

Strategically, it was argued that by introducing such a design, the overwhelming British strength in battleships had been made worthless. This ignored the fact that some nation was sure to produce such a ship before long, as can be seen from the existence of the CUNIBERTI and MICHIGAN designs.

¹¹ cf. Bacon, Fisher, Vol. VI, p. 266.

Tactically, the discussion was more profound and involved a number of officers of distinction, among them Admiral Mahan of the United States (whom history has proven to be a strategist but not a tactician), Admiral Custance, Sir William White, who was the ex-director of Naval Construction, and others. These arguments questioned the value of superior speed, the suppression of secondary batteries and the great size of the ships. Here the Admiralty was in difficulties; they did not wish to release the official interpretation of the results of the Russo-Japanese War as embodied in their tactical thinking; they particularly did not wish to release the battle practice results which demonstrated the superiority of the 12" guns over the 9.2" in weights of hits per minute when both were within range, despite the latter's rapidity of fire. In the end, the argument was allowed to run its course. It played a lesser part in the later service dissension than some of the other problems.

The third argument was fiscal. The cost of the ship was objected to in many quarters, mainly on the grounds that "many eggs were being put in a large and expensive basket." The answer here was in the better balance of protection and the greater number of guns per mile or per pound sterling obtainable with a large ship. The actual issue of cost was undercut as an argument by the completion of LORD NELSON and AGAMEMNON, two pre-dreadnought ships too far along to be altered. These worked out at £ 1,616,000 each; their fighting power was obviously less. There was also argument over the expense of building larger drydocks. This, of course, is with us still, and is a fallacy of logical reasoning.

Professor Marder considers the introduction of the DREADNOUGHT as a remarkable instance of genius, an opinion shared by a number of naval officers well known as analysts of the period.¹² The writer, viewing the operation from within our own service some years later, considers it not so much an exhibition of genius as an exhibition of management and executive ability unsurpassed by any of our own recent programs which share some of the characteristics.¹³

C. The Battle Cruiser - INVINCIBLE. The "armored cruiser" designs produced by the committee had a similar background. The results created less controversy at the time, probably because the first ship was not completed until 1908, but have since been considered a failure largely because of the battle performance of the type in both wars.

The ship produced was totally unlike anything which had gone before. Relevant particulars were:¹⁴

Size:	567' long, 78' beam, 27' draft
Displacement:	20,125 tons (max. load)
Guns:	8-12", 16-4"
Armor:	6" side, 7" turrets
Engines:	turbines, 4 shafts
Speed:	25 knots
Cost:	£ 1,635,739

This is a ship of battleship size and cost, with a modified battleship gun armament, cruiser protection and higher speed than any contemporary

¹² Marder, Road to War, p. 69.

¹³ In the future, say ten years, when full information can be released, a parallel study of the DREADNOUGHT, the nuclear propulsion program and the Polaris program should be a most interesting work.

¹⁴ Parkes, British Battleships.

ship afloat except a destroyer. The concept was of a ship capable of high speed over long distances, with armament to cut down any cruiser. At the same time, she was fast enough to stay away from anything she could not fight--thus speed replaced armor. She could therefore scout, run down any raiding cruiser squadron, or any high speed armed merchant ship, and keep the enemy's scouting cruisers away from the battle fleet. There is little doubt that this concept was much more Fisher's favorite than the DREADNOUGHT type battleship. His correspondence and papers contain many references to its virtues. Furthermore in 1914, he was personally responsible for the action which resulted in REPLUSE, RENOWN, FURIOUS, COURAGEOUS and HOOD. All of these ships, much altered in a later life which extended to World War II, originally carried this concept to an extreme degree. For example, FURIOUS as built, had light cruiser protection and two 18" guns.¹⁵

The contemporary arguments over the INVINCIBLE were much the same as those over the DREADNOUGHT. As has been mentioned, they were tempered by the fact that the DREADNOUGHT design was an accepted fact by the time of INVINCIBLE's completion. In addition, a far-sighted contemporary, still anonymous, wrote in Brassey's¹⁶ Naval Annual:

Vessels of this enormous size and cost are unsuitable for many of the duties of cruisers; but an even stronger objection...is that an Admiral having INVINCIBLEs in his fleet will be certain to put

¹⁵Jane, Fighting Ships, 1919 edition; Parkes, British Battleships.

¹⁶Parkes, British Battleships, p. 492.

them in the line of battle, where their comparatively light protection will be a disadvantage and their high speed of no value.

In fact, World War I demonstrated the limitation of the concept clearly. The "cruiser-killing" function was effective only at the Falkland and Helgoland actions, both in 1914. Jutland¹⁷ showed that some features had been left out of consideration. First, low visibility, very prevalent in the North Sea, would frequently result in short range action or at least in unexpected encounter with heavy ships within gun range. Second, the relatively long battle ranges resulted in hits on deck by plunging shells, against which there was very little protection.¹⁸ Third, the natural aggressiveness of the average Commanding Officer in battle, and the desire of any Admiral to concentrate his whole force, resulted inevitably in these ships coming into action with battleships, which was assuredly a role they were not designed for.

It seems fair to say that the battle-cruiser concept was an error. Higher speed for battleships, the later British approach, resulted in the QUEEN ELIZABETH class, which were used successfully in World War II; heavier protection for battle cruisers, at some sacrifice of speed and gun power, was the German approach. Either step, the former particularly, produced much more effective fighting ships.

¹⁷ H. H. Frost, The Battle of Jutland; C. V. Usborne, Blast and Counterblast; W. S. Chalmers, David Beatty; Jellicoe, The Grand Fleet and Naval Operations are all useful works on Jutland. There are many others.

¹⁸ The consensus of informed opinion on the loss at Jutland of three battle cruisers, and of HOOD in 1941, indicates that this was the cause.

CHAPTER X

ADMIRALTY ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS¹

A. Introduction. The rest of the Admiralty structure under Fisher's administration presents a very large number of changes. These are briefly discussed in this chapter. This cursory coverage is not because these changes were unimportant; it is rather because they presented no drastic overturning of the previous structure, are of a nature which any effective administration might be expected to undertake, and are of nature readily made clear in a few sentences because of their resemblance to problems of our own service and time. They should be mentioned to give a rounded picture of the capacity of Fisher for executive delegation, combined with enough detailed supervision to ensure control.

Almost all these activities were carried out in typical Fisher style for matters of a relatively simple nature: a policy was set; an individual or committee was appointed to take or recommend action; if they failed to produce at once, they got the axe; if anyone got in their way, he got the axe. This sounds like Chapter I of a book on an old-fashioned corporation president, and perhaps a sufficient portrait of the 1904 Admiralty can be imagined to indicate the impact of this kind of operation.

¹Bacon, Fisher, main source.

B. Gunnery. The standards of performance, frequency and methods of practice were placed under the supervision of the Inspector of Target Practice. To this post was appointed Rear Admiral Percy Scott, the "father of modern gunnery."² The idea for such a post stemmed from the appointment of W. S. Sims, then a lieutenant commander, to a similar post in the U. S.³ With the assistance of Jellicoe, then Director of Naval Ordnance, equipment was improved, competition between ships was introduced and results promulgated through the fleet. The results were spectacular; as Fisher was fond of quoting, the year before this step was taken (1904), there were 2000 more misses than hits. The year after, 1906, with about the same number of rounds fired, the ratio was reversed.

Scott was every bit as difficult an individual as Fisher. He felt he should have been a member of the Board.⁴ More important, he believed that long range firing should not be introduced until effective fire control methods, specifically Scott's "director,"⁵ had been installed. This did not coincide with Fisher's idea, which was to extend ranges rapidly in the interests of readiness to fight with what was available. This led to disagreement, but in the meantime, a great deal had been accomplished both in actual results and in the attitude towards gunnery.

² C. V. Usborne, Blast and Counterblast.

³ Sir Percy Scott, Fifty Years in The Royal Navy (which is where Scott quotes a description of himself as a "peculiar wild animal to let loose on a tame Board of Admiralty).

⁴ Ibid., p. 188

⁵ The direct ancestor of all modern gun fire control systems.

On board ship, the Captain's future, as well as the Gunnery Officer's, now depended on gunnery. This fact alone had a considerable effect.

C. Ship Maintenance. To make the reduced number of ships in active commission fully effective, stress was placed on repairs by the ships force. Teeth were given this stress by the rigid requirement that only one battleship at a time from each fleet was to be in the dockyard. Ships requiring major repairs were decommissioned and replaced by reserve ships.

D. Submarines. Submarine development was pressed forward and given considerable detailed personal supervision by Fisher. Forty-one submarines were built during his six year period as First Sea Lord, as contrasted with but 11 in the following 3 years before World War I began.

E. Dockyards. These received a sweeping overhaul. A review of the personnel requirements resulted in dismissal of 6,000 employees. The internal organization of the Dockyards was changed so that the Admiral Superintendent had effective coordination control of all the departments--engineering, construction and ordnance--in the yard. Duplication in facilities were reduced or eliminated. The heads of the individual departments were "constituted as managers."⁶ A little further research indicated that this meant these officers were given relatively direct and complete authority and responsibility for the

⁶Bacon, Fisher, Vol 2., p. 9.

work being done by their different departments. A Director of Dockyard Work was appointed under the Controller of the Admiralty to complete the chain of command with a central head. Production methods were studied carefully in an effort to get all the Dockyards in a state of efficiency similar to that which had enabled Portsmouth to build DREADNOUGHT in a year.

F. Supply. A committee reviewed the entire supply system. Inventory turnover was the first target. £ 20,000,000 worth of stock was held with big annual loss from deterioration. Open ended contracts for commodity-type items (a modern touch) were adopted, among other measures. Commercial items were substituted for "Admiralty Pattern" where possible. In many cases, the Admiralty was buying items long since off the commercial market. Stores issue was changed so as to prevent scrapping and replacement of economically repairable items. Obsolete material was disposed of in quantity. Duplicate supplies amongst departments of the Admiralty were consolidated.

All this sounds as if it could have been written yesterday, and the achievements were substantial. There are many anecdotes of Fisher in this area. He evidently derived keen enjoyment from finding some administrative or logistic absurdity and using it as a horrible example.⁷ The eventual results were considerable.

⁷ Obviously complete success was impossible. The writer's father went to an Admiralty surplus auction when the Bermuda dockyard was closed in 1947. Some of the material had been there for many years. One of the lots was: "Pots, Chamber, Fluted, Flag Officers, for the use of - 4."

The improvement of the living conditions of the "lower deck," discussed in Chapter VII, required a good deal of overhauling of the supply branch operation, since "Purser's matters" included clothing, messing and provisions.

At this point it might be mentioned that many of the changes and adjustments in the rating structures and pay are listed by Bacon as "minor reforms," in the section from which much of this information is drawn. Since many of these proposals figured in "The Scheme," principally as part of the detailed workings of the nucleus crew proposal, it does not appear that Fisher thought them minor, an impression increased by his own statements as quoted in Chapter VII.

G. Budgetary and Fiscal. As part of the investigation of the supply organization, the accounting methods throughout the Admiralty had been brought up to date. More important, however, were the budgetary and fiscal reforms. A committee was formed to review each proposed "Vote," or appropriation in our parlance, which formed part of the Navy Estimates (the Navy portion of the budget submitted to Parliament by the Cabinet). This committee, with Fisher himself as Chairman, reviewed each vote with the Sea Lord responsible in great detail, seeking possible reductions. It shortly became apparent that, as still happens in the budgetary area, there were numerous cases in which he who was responsible for the expenditure of the funds was not responsible for preparing the budgetary estimate. Furthermore, the requirements had in many cases not been coordinated or viewed as an integral part of the

whole until they reached a level at which it was impossible to assess them in detail. Estimates were padded so as to avoid all chance of needing a supplementary vote.

It is unnecessary to go into further detail on this subject; the resemblance to the budgetary problems and remedies of our own period is most marked. Largely as a result of the work of this committee, the Estimates decreased for 1905-6, despite the changes which had not fully taken effect at that time. They held steady in 1907-8, and began to increase again in 1908-09 as a result of the increased building program. This decrease in estimates furnished ammunition for those who argued that the changes being made were solely for the sake of economy and were detrimental to the security of the country.

Chapter X completes the semi-chronological review of the actual "Fisher reforms," and some of the specific controversies which resulted. Next, it seems appropriate to review two major generalized controversies which arose during the period and which had important effects on the service. Thereafter, some of the personal characteristics of Fisher as an individual and leader will be discussed.

CHAPTER XI

DISSENSION

A. Introduction. There were a number of generalized controversies during Fisher's period as First Sea Lord which are not readily assignable to any one of the reforms. They are, however, important to an understanding of the man and his methods. This chapter deals with the two most important examples. The first is his habitual method of ensuring a loyal and efficient supporting staff, which gave rise to the expressive term "Fishpond." The second is the Fisher-Beresford controversy, a violent public feud the full effects of which on the Royal Navy are still the subject of disagreement.

B. The "Fishpond." There is no doubt that Fisher believed in early identification of competent officers of brains and loyalty, and their steady advancement by assignment to key billets. Marder quotes two remarks drawn from some of the correspondence which sum up his views well, "Favoritism is the secret of efficiency," meaning the selective assignment just mentioned; "If I haul a man up over the shoulders of his seniors, that man is going to take care to show I haven't made a mistake." Three examples of this policy are the careers of Jellicoe, Madden, and Bacon. Each of these officers was marked by Fisher as of high ability as a junior Captain; the name of each is found in committees, and in key Admiralty and Fleet appointments thereafter. Jellicoe served successively

as Director of Naval Ordnance, Second in Command of the Atlantic Fleet, Third Sea Lord and Controller, Commander of the Second Division of the Home Fleet, and Second Sea Lord.¹ There was no thought in anyone's mind that these appointments were not merited. On the contrary, they were approved. However, as one officer serving at the time wrote of 1914, "Years back, it had been common talk in the Admiralty that Admiral Jellicoe was being kept in cotton wool to command the Fleet in the Great War."² The validity of the rumor is illustrated by many letters, including one from Fisher to his son in 1912.³ Fisher continued to influence Churchill in this regard until 1914.

While such action as this is justifiable, there is little doubt that Fisher insisted upon completely loyal and wholehearted support from his associates, that in many cases he took action to rid himself of those who disagreed, and that he was capable of vindictive action against the careers of those who actively opposed him. There were exceptions: Sir Gerald Noel, who was Commander-in-Chief in China in 1905, carried his protests against the removal of his five battleships so far that he was officially rebuked by the First Lord for his repeated communications direct to him instead of the Board, disregarding Fisher. Yet, he held some further high appointments and became an Admiral of the Fleet.⁴ The majority of the examples, however, show his normal practice

¹Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built, pp. 177-79.

²Usborne, Blast and Counterblast, p. 31.

³Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2., p. 459.

⁴Marder, Road to War, p. 85.

to be the reverse of this episode, although some were doubtless prejudiced. His often repeated threat to make "the wives widows, their children fatherless and their homes a dunghill" was well understood to refer to the service careers of those who opposed him.

Lady Wemyss⁵ writes of an interview of her husband with Fisher. He was offered the post of Naval Secretary (to the First Sea Lord), an important position which he was naturally eager to take. However, he refused it indignantly when Fisher hinted that since Wemyss would be advanced over many of his seniors, "absolute subserviency to his views" would be demanded. Wemyss thereafter refused to speak to Fisher. While Lady Wemyss was undoubtedly one of the society ladies who were part of the pro-Beresford, anti-Fisher group, there is no reason to doubt her veracity or that she accurately reflected the views of her husband, who eventually became First Sea Lord in 1918. Wemyss had friends in positions to protect him and never spoke out against Fisher.

Keyes⁶ describes an episode in which he discovered in 1907 that he had incurred Fisher's displeasure and was not to be appointed to a command, essential to his future. On being informed privately that he was suspected of having helped with publicity for the Beresford side of the controversy, he traced this rumor to its source and discovered that the problem was one of circumstantial evidence and mistaken identity. Keyes later incurred Fisher's disapproval because the latter believed

⁵Lady Wemyss, The Life and Letters of Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Westor Wemyss, p. 99 ff.

⁶Lord Keyes, The Naval Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, Vol. 1, p. 20 ff.

Keyes responsible for the somewhat desultory progress made between 1910 and 1914 in submarine readiness, an impression he was never able to get Fisher to let go of. Professor Marder quotes the case of Lieutenant Commander Domville, later an Admiral, from whom the story was obtained in person. Domville wrote a prize essay in 1906, urging a stronger secondary armament in Dreadnoughts, something which was anathema. Domville outlines in detail efforts to shunt him into backwaters, and to have him medically retired, before 1912.⁷ Anyone Fisher considered stupid got equally short shrift. Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee had incurred Fisher's displeasure in earlier years. For this reason and because he mentioned to Fisher in 1914 that he had suggested sending battle cruisers to Cradock before Coronel, Fisher's reaction was to immediately inform Churchill that he would no longer tolerate "that damn fool as Chief of Staff at the Admiralty."⁸

The consequence of episodes like these was a widespread impression best described in the words of two of Fisher's supporters, quoted by Marder. Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg:

He is a truly great man, and almost all his schemes have benefited the Navy. But he has started this pernicious partisanship in the Navy...Anyone who in any way opposed J.F. went under.⁹

⁷Marder, Road to War, p. 86.

⁸Geoffrey Bennett, Coronel and the Falklands.

⁹Battenberg, An Account, Admiral King-Hall, 1909. Quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 85.

Winston Churchill:

(Fisher) acted up to his ferocious declarations...to be a Fisherite or, as the Navy put it, to be in the 'Fishpond' was, during his first term of power, an indispensable prerequisite for preferment.¹⁰

Naturally, it cannot be said that such a feeling is desirable in any organization. Part C of this chapter contains a few comments on the ultimate effects of the 'Fishpond' problem and the Beresford feud which follows.

C. Fisher and Beresford.

1. Beresford.¹¹ First we should consider the opposing party in this affair. Beresford was an officer of wealth and high social position, who was a highly proficient seaman of the old school. He had not served in steam ships, except briefly, for the first 14 years after he entered the Navy in 1861. He entered Parliament in 1874, as was then entirely permissible for an active officer. Thereafter, he several times contested Admiralty policy in the House. On at least one occasion, Admiralty objections to this conduct were overridden by the government of the day. He had a highly successful naval career and came to public notice prominently in the Egyptian campaign in the early 1880's. He was, as has been mentioned earlier, important in the passage of the Naval Defense Act of 1889, after which he returned to sea, commanding a cruiser with substantial success. Between 1891 and 1900, he was on half pay most of the time, re-entering Parliament in 1897 as member for Portsmouth North, where there

¹⁰Churchill, Great Contemporaries, p. 299. Quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 85.

¹¹Primary source: Beresford, Memoirs; Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built.

were many Navy "lower deck" families. In 1900, it is fair to say that he was the best known naval officer of his generation, extravagantly popular with the public and with the fleet; his powers of leadership were undoubtedly great. He was also very popular in society and had been an honorary aide to the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) since 1875. While his abilities as a seagoing naval officer were considerable, it is also evident from his writing and speeches in Parliament that his intellectual attainments were not great, and that he was frequently most outspoken and even ill-considered in his public statements. It is easy to see how the combination of Parliamentary privilege and influence with success in the service could give almost anyone the feeling of a unique position in the Navy, both as to knowledge and influence, and also a feeling of vested right to head the service. Added to a strong will and an enormous popular following which, however, was not quite as large as Beresford sometimes thought, the situation was made to order for violent conflict.

2. Fisher and Beresford - First Stage. Fisher and Beresford seem to have worked fairly well together on the whole in the Mediterranean. There was certainly friction, some of which has already been mentioned. On the other hand, Fisher's letters of the period, both to Beresford and others,¹² and Beresford's¹³ comments in his memoirs, indicate a

¹²Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 1, Part II, Chap. I.

¹³Beresford, Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford.

degree of mutual respect and a willingness to cooperate in reforms and progress. Certainly Beresford continued a successful career as a Flag Officer and by 1905 had become Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

There are several opinions on the origins of the final dispute. Chatfield,¹⁴ Bacon,¹⁵ Smith¹⁶ and others attributed it to the signalling incident or some of the other episodes of Fisher's Mediterranean Command. However, the writer agrees with Marder¹⁷ that Beresford was certain that Fisher would retire in January 1906, at the age limit and that Beresford would succeed him. When Fisher was appointed an additional Admiral of the Fleet by Special Order in Council in 1905, thereby gaining five more years on the active list, Beresford's hopes were at an end. That this was the real cause of the final split is implied to some extent by Bacon.

In any case, by the end of 1905, Beresford was damning everything the Admiralty did, publicly and privately, while Fisher could write:

That blatant boastful ass Beresford has been writing the most utter trash I ever read in my life. The outcome is that the Sea Lords of the Admiralty are imbeciles and Beresford is the one and only man who knows anything.¹⁸

¹⁴Chatfield, The Navy and Defense, p. 41.

¹⁵Bacon, Fisher, Vol. I, p. 138 ff.

¹⁶Smith, A Yellow Admiral Remembers, Chap. VIII.

¹⁷Marder, Road to War, p. 90.

¹⁸Fisher to Balfour, September 1905, Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. III, p. 27.

A few years earlier Fisher's letters had been excusing Beresford's indiscretions in supporting Fisher's ideas.¹⁹ Beresford, as the most senior and by far the best known officer who was opposed to Fisher, as well as an outspoken controversialist, was a natural center for the opposition to Fisher. Fisher was to speak frequently of the "conspiracy" the members of which he referred to among other things as the "Adullamites" and the "syndicate of discontent." How much of a conspiracy there was is not altogether clear, although there is an amusing anecdote of a scene in Beresford's living room. A senior officer reporting to the Board of Admiralty, who had served with Beresford, went round to call on him. Being in uniform, he was shown in without inquiry to find himself in the middle of a meeting of a number of very senior officers who took great pains to drop papers under the table, or become otherwise employed, so that their identity would not become obvious to a supposed Fisherite.²⁰

3. The Final Explosion--1907-1909. In 1907, Beresford assumed command of the Channel Fleet, which by then was the primary seagoing force of the Navy. Rear Admiral Reginald Custance was his second in command. He had collided with Fisher a few years before while Director of Naval Intelligence; was an officer of strong and dogmatic opinions, and heartily dislike him. Captain Doveton Sturdee, later the victor

¹⁹ Fisher to Lord Selborne, March 26, 1902, Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. I, p. 234.

²⁰ Baron, Fisher, Vol. 2, pp. 44-5. The officer was Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman.

of the Falklands, was Chief of Staff. He also disliked Fisher, apparently because Fisher had requested him to write to him privately about Beresford, who was "inclined to be wild about service matters." Sturdee, not unnaturally, considered this unthinkable disloyal conduct and did not comply.²¹ Bacon suggests that it was this combination of personalities which caused Beresford to go as far as he did.²²

Whatever the proximate cause, Beresford immediately began a correspondence with the Admiralty, the content of which spread through his fleet and somewhat to the public, couched in remarkably tactless and insubordinate terms. This correspondence dealt with all the reforms and also the war plans. As mentioned earlier, he referred to the new Home Fleet as "a fraud upon the public and a danger to the empire." The Admiralty and Fisher were impelled to reply, pointing out that his language was not conducive to good relations. At that time General War Orders were issued by the Admiralty. Plans were prepared by the Fleet Commanders, based on these orders, for approval. An acrimonious correspondence on the subject developed which ended in an interview between Beresford, Fisher and Lord Tweedmouth, then the First Lord. The transcript of this meeting exists. It supports the contention of many writers that Beresford's intellectual attainments and judgment were by no means the equal of his other personal qualities. It also illustrates the insubordination of Beresford, although he denied any such

²¹Comment by Sturdee. Quoted in Bennett, Coronel and Falklands, p. 118. The specific source is not given, although Admiral Sturdee's unpublished recollections are listed in the bibliography.

²²Marder, Road to War, p. 91, quoting a 1941 letter from Admiral Bacon:

intention or action.²³ Fisher's correspondence is colorful in this period, and indicates he made some efforts to get along with Beresford. In January, he wrote:²⁴

I had three hours with Beresford yesterday, and all is settled... but I had as a preliminary to agree to three things. I. Lord C. Beresford is a greater man than Nelson. II. No one knows anything about the art of naval war except Lord C. Beresford. III. The Admiralty hasn't done a single d---d thing right.

The controversy languished slightly between July and late 1907, but there were a series of episodes of various sorts thereafter. In one instance, he stated officially that the Admiralty was taking action which "had the appearance of a wish to handicap and hamper..." and was prejudicing the careers of officers associated with him. In another instance, he endeavored to have Percy Scott, by now in command of the 1st Cruiser Squadron, relieved in a dispute about an ill-judged exchange of signals. The Admiralty declined to do so.

By 1908, the controversy had become service-wide knowledge and was receiving publicity more and more frequently. Fisher and Beresford were publicly not on speaking terms. The Beresford element had consolidated all of the various charges against the Fisher administration and was demanding an open inquiry into Admiralty policy. Such a situation could not be tolerated. After considerable pressure on the part of Fisher, the application of which did little to change his opinion of politicians, and with the backing of Reginald McKenna, now the First Lord, the decision was made to terminate Beresford's command when the consolidation

²³Marder, Road to War, pp. 93-5.

²⁴Letter of January 21, 1907, Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2, p. 115.

between Channel and Home Fleets took place in March 1909. The agitation and public interest were greatly increased by the Naval Scare of 1908-09. This scare involved considerable public alarm over German shipbuilding programs, and criticism of the Admiralty for an inadequate program. It had been building up over the same period as the controversy, 1907-09. The Admiralty became convinced of the situation sufficiently to insist, under the leadership of McKenna and Fisher, on eight battleships instead of four in the 1909 program. The situation became an acute Cabinet crisis; the Sea Lords and McKenna were ready to resign on the one hand and some of the radical Cabinet members were ready to do the same on the other. Spurred on by party politics, the public uproar became acute. The Admiralty was accused of having placed the nation in a position in which Germany would overtake them in capital ships in the next few years, and also of having been blind to long continued German preparations. In the end, the rumors of German achievements turned out to be exaggerated, but at this moment, the Admiralty was being severely criticized for being "caught napping."

With this uproar as well as a fine public reception on giving up his command behind him, Beresford conferred with Balfour, then a leading Opposition member, and then went to Asquith, the Prime Minister, with a demand for a public investigation by the Cabinet, threatening to go to the public with the issue if the inquiry were not granted. Asquith finally agreed to private investigation by a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defense, composed of Cabinet members. Beresford made a number

of charges, quite general in nature, in writing. These are discussed in the following section.

The fact that an inquiry was granted at the instance of an officer serving in a subordinate position was a blow which staggered Fisher. He considered the Cabinet was literally condoning mutiny and wished to resign. He was dissuaded from this act, which of course would have given credibility to the charges.

Imagine what a state of affairs when a meeting of naval officers on the active list in a room in Grosvenor Street is able to coerce the Cabinet...²⁵

The committee's deliberation was lengthy. At one point, it came to light that two officers in the Naval Intelligence Department had been supplying Beresford with confidential information to support his case. This revelation did little to help Beresford's allegations of underhanded tactics against him, and enraged Asquith.

In the end, the committee finding indicated that the Admiralty had not endangered the country, and that Beresford had failed to carry out their instructions and recognize their authority. They watered this down by saying that the Board should have taken Lord Charles more into their confidence. Fisher characterized the finding as "a most cowardly production."²⁶ It contained one recommendation: the establishment of a Naval War Staff. There was no suggestion that Beresford had made a "frivolous complaint," in the sense of the naval regulations against

²⁵Letter of April 13, 1909, quoted in Bacon, Vol. 2, p. 50.

²⁶Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 2, p. 56.

such conduct, although this was the opinion of many of the Cabinet members.

Although privately supported by King Edward, who remained as staunch a supporter as he had been for many years, and by many members of the Cabinet, the controversy was becoming too great. Fisher still had a year before retiring age. However, his only logical successor was Admiral of the Fleet Sir A. K. Wilson, who would assure continuity of policy but was only two years younger. Fisher therefore resigned effective January 25, 1910. He became a Peer, as Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, on November 9, 1909.

D. Summary of Sources of Conflict in the Fisher Administration. It is convenient here to mention the main charges levelled at Fisher, both formally in the Beresford committee inquiry, and informally within and without the service.

Beresford's main charge was that the organization of the Admiralty for war was defective, specifically in that he had not been given proper means to carry out his mission. This charge was disposed of by the committee; it amounted to a question of judgment as to proper measures. However, he also charged that the alleged deficiencies in war plans were due to the lack of a Naval War Staff. There was in fact no operational staff at the Admiralty in Fisher's time, and he was adamantly opposed to such an organization. He was a firm believer in one-man control, more especially in war, and he felt strongly that war plans should be a matter of the utmost secrecy and known to as few as possible. This attitude, however, did not indicate a disinterest in strategy because

of a total preoccupation with material. The lectures to the Mediterranean Fleet officers and the establishment of the Naval War College at Portsmouth in 1906, as well as much of his correspondence, confirm his sense of the importance of such matters.

The question of a Naval War Staff is related to a charge that Fisher substituted one-man control for the traditional Board operation. This is correct, as nearly as we can distinguish. There were few Board meetings while he was First Sea Lord; he preferred to deal with each member individually and he and the First Lord would then proceed to a decision. As will be mentioned in a later chapter, Fisher took care that he always had the First Lord's backing, whether by overawing him or by convincing him of the merits of his plans. No one in the government was really under the impression anyone else was running the Admiralty; he was even consulted in the later appointments of First Lords. On one occasion, in 1905, his letters record that he rejected Balfour's nominee.²⁷ Fisher's backers felt that this was the only way the changes could have been accomplished. Certainly it was the only way Fisher was willing to work. Marder points out that the First Lord and First Sea Lord were under no legal obligation to consult the Board as a whole or as individuals.²⁸ The other Board members retained the legal duty of refusal to concur with a decision, but their powers of influence were negative only, as implied by the discussion in Chapter III. Under the form of the British

²⁷Letter of March 3, 1905. Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 3, p. 24.

²⁸Road to War, p. 79.

Constitution, a change in procedure can easily give rise to argument about constitutionality. There is also testimony that prior to making a decision he was open to argument and discussion to a substantial degree. Bacon²⁹ and Jellicoe³⁰ both leave words to this effect.

Another charge was that of "espionage" in the Fleet. Fisher was in the habit of calling on relatively junior officers for opinions, and this led him to requests for correspondence which were resented when discovered. A major explosion took place in 1908, when some letters which Bacon had written him while in the Mediterranean in 1905 under Lord Charles Beresford were revealed. These contained nothing in the way of comments on Beresford, but they did relate to policy and political complications. The fact that such correspondence took place was shocking to many. "Espionage" is an excessively strong term; however, this was at least an unusual method of obtaining information.

Charges of favoritism and vindictiveness have been discussed earlier in this chapter in the "Fishpond" section.

Another charge arose from the use made of the press. This was anathema to most of the Royal Navy in that day. The interest of the press in the Navy has been discussed. Making use of this, Fisher took care that he had the backing of the press and that they were given proper communication. This resulted in at least an even division of press support in the controversy. Spender, Stead and Arnold White were

²⁹Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, Chap. IX; also a quote in Marder, Road to War, p. 80.

³⁰Quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 80.

three journalists who were among his close associates. In his corner during his time as First Sea Lord were most of the Liberal press and some of the Conservative, most importantly, "The Times." While far from the norm of Navy policy in the period, it may be considered inevitable in the circumstance that the press was used to stave off attack.

A final charge was the haste employed and the unnecessary antagonisms generated in making the reforms. That the reforms had been thoroughly worked out, both in earlier years and in current detailed planning, is clear from the discussion of the individual reforms earlier in this paper. Rapid execution was a basic Fisher technique for ensuring completion, and therefore reasonable evaluation not based on theory but on a tested concept. In some cases, such as the DREADNOUGHT, haste was essential. The antagonism was an unfortunate personal Fisher characteristic which is discussed in Chapter XII.

This completes the summary of the basis for most of the controversies. It is worthwhile considering here the long range effects of these controversies, which have been debated over many years. The writer has encountered all sorts of comments, some acrimonious in the literature. It appears that as far as his opponents are concerned, the older and more bitter were gone by 1914. There were still some who disliked him and tended to lay all deficiencies at his door; Wemyss is one. But almost all seem to have acquired a more objective attitude, recognizing the benefits for what they were. It is most noticeable that no one,

except in the extreme heat of anger in 1909, ever questioned his motives in acting as he did--his devotion to the good of the service was too obvious and well known.

Beatty's³¹ attitude seems to the writer to express the feelings of many who were never on the policy level during Fisher's tour as First Sea Lord and never had a serious encounter with him. This was an attitude of mild distaste for a personality and method that were highly anomalous in the service of the time, and an objective attitude towards the positive achievements of Fisher and those he trained. Much of the World War I period material reflects this; it appears to the writer to indicate that the "dissension" did not last long enough or extend far enough down the fleet, to have any serious effect after war broke out. Fisher's return, November 1914-May 1915, may have reopened wounds, particularly in the case of those of whom he disapproved, e.g., Keyes;³² and certainly there was private dismay in some quarters.³³ However, the effectiveness of his energetic action in getting things moving seem to have carried the confidence of most of the fleet, as indicated by the letters on his resignation in 1915.³⁴ On the whole, it seems justifiable to conclude that, except for those who may have lacked confidence in his leadership in 1914-15, the effects of the dissensions a few years earlier are not

³¹Chalmers, Life and Letters of David Beatty, p. 85 et. seq.

³²Keyes, Naval Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 129.

³³cf. Wemyss, p. 186.

³⁴Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, vol. 3, pp. 243-5.

discernible in the performance of the Royal Navy in World War I.

This does not necessarily apply to other aspects of the Fisher era, the effects of which are noticeable. These points are discussed in Chapter XIII.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?¹

A. Introduction. Before going on to glance at World War I, and some speculations on lessons for our own time, let us consider some of the personal characteristics of the individual whose accomplishments and difficulties we have been reviewing. Presumably the fact that Fisher's personality, characteristics and methods were sources of difficulty has been made clear. As Professor Marder says:²

Fisher inevitably made enemies--he made them right and left. 'He took them all on and there was something about him which goaded enmity to dementia.'

For the purpose of this paper, which is to produce a sketch of the Fisher era as an example of the management of a Navy, it is desirable to consider some apparent contradictions in a little detail: while the achievements of the era are undoubted, it was for a long time difficult for the writer, as a naval officer, to understand how such a man could have led a service, especially a service such as the Royal Navy of 1890-1910, to these achievements.

Recently the writer made a study of Fisher as revealed in the literature against one of the better known sets of leadership criteria. The illustrative material has been largely included in the earlier portions of this paper. The evaluation is summarized briefly in this chapter. A

¹Mark IV; 14, "What manner of man is that that even the wind and sea obey him?"

²Marder, Road to War, p. 81. The internal quote I assume to be from the Journals and Letters of Lord Esher.

illustrative incidents which are particularly appropriate are also included.

B. Criteria. The object of this portion is not to evaluate "quality" of leadership, but to relate Fisher's behavior to modern scales designed to measure what leaders do in attaining group goals. The criteria used are drawn from a series of Ohio State University Leadership studies, and are the following:³

- a. Communications; measured by the degree to which the leader communicates with subordinates.
- b. Organization; measured by the degree to which the leader structures the group which he supervises.
- c. Integration; measured by the degree to which he integrates his unit into a closely built working team.
- d. Representation; measured by the degree to which he speaks or acts as representative of the group.
- e. Relations with subordinates; measured by the degree to which he maintains cordial working relations with juniors.
- f. Relations with superiors; measured by the degree to which he maintains cordial working relations with superiors.

An important general point in considering Fisher's leadership is his identification with the main goal of the Royal Navy, considered as a group. Few of his opponents ever questioned his motives--his patriotism and loyalty to the Navy. When they did so, as in the case of Beresford in the last stages of the controversy, they were hardly taken seriously.⁴

³Stogdill and Shartle, Methods in the Study of Administrative Leadership.

⁴cf. Beresford, The Betrayal.

C. Communications. The evidence on this dimension is conflicting. On the one hand, we have often-used phrases from his pen, "Never explain," and "It is only damn fools who argue."⁵ On the other hand, we have the fact that he went so far in his efforts to receive accurate information on conditions and opinions as to encourage, and even require, correspondence from Captains in some of the key positions in the various fleets. While effective, this sort of correspondence led to the charges of espionage discussed in Chapter XI, Section C.

On balance, it appears that he took many positive steps to ensure adequate communication when he felt it required. His lectures to the officers of the Mediterranean Fleet and views on reducing internal Navy official secrecy are clearly recorded.⁶ His voluminous correspondence indicates he took pains to make himself understood, except by those whom he believed to be permanently opposed to what he contemplated.

D. Representation. This stands out as an area in which Fisher was strong. Marder states:

When he became First Sea Lord, the heads of big shipbuilding, engineering, and ordnance firms, professors and many other great and clever men always seemed anxious, ready, and willing to carry out his views. No person in his day could get big things done quicker than Lord Fisher.⁷

His relations with the public and press redounded very much to the advantage of the Navy. He was most successful in using the press and

⁵Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2.

⁶Bacon, Fisher, Vol. 1, p. 175.

⁷Fear God and Dread Nought. Vol. 2, p. 17.

maintaining good relations with them, as mentioned in Chapter XI.

Fisher was somewhat less successful in dealing with parliamentary politicians. The main difficulty was a strong contempt for politicians-- "less for their want of brains than for their lack of character...",⁸ as illustrated earlier.

E. Organization. A discussion of Lord Fisher's activities which tended "to prescribe ways of doing things" is unnecessary in view of the extensive discussion of him as a one-man Admiralty. However, some amplification as to his working methods is appropriate.

His actual working habits are good evidence of the amount of detailed management he did while at the Admiralty. He was always ready for work by 5 or 5:30 AM, sometimes as early as 4. He dealt with papers which required consideration in detail or thought during these early morning hours, and on Sundays. He retired invariably by 9:30 PM when working. As a sidelight, this caused a considerable problem when he was associated with Winston Churchill in 1914-15, since for all practical purposes the two had few common working hours. There are frequent accounts by those associated with him of his very rapid grasp of the content of a paper, and quick decisions. We have seen examples of his reactions to opposition; however, before a decision was taken and if he trusted the speaker, Bacon testifies that:

No man of strong views was ever so open to argument as Lord Fisher. Open to be convinced on any matter of which he had not himself accurate and technical knowledge, but adamant where prevision

⁸ Road to War, p. 17.

led him to form his own conclusions...

After a recital of some details, Bacon continues:

It is details such as these that, for those who knew him, dispelled the idea that he was a hasty, self-willed autocrat in all matters affecting his opinions...⁹

In short, not surprisingly, in method of operation Fisher fits the description of a number of conspicuously successful business executives of the period between his own and ours.

F. Integration. There is no difficulty in resolving this area. Information in relation to "behavior which tends to hold the group together" is almost entirely negative. To understand why this might be so, it is only necessary to consider the examples so far cited of his contempt for tradition and disregard of human values in dealing with others in the service. "Do right and damn the odds" was a phrase he was found of, and seems an accurate description of his views on anyone who seemed obstructive. His comments on members of the service reflected in the correspondence are violent to a degree. The "blatant, boastful ass" applied to Beresford is relatively mild.

His motive in his personnel methods is not open to question. However, the effects at the time were not good for morale. "Fear of reprisal haunted those not in the Fishpond."¹⁰

⁹Obituary Notice, 1920, quoted in Marder, Road to War, p. 81.

¹⁰Marder, Road to War, p. 87.

G. Relations with Subordinates. His great personal charm and the driving force of his personality are well attested to, and the effect on his more junior subordinates, the public, and those outside the Navy is clear.¹¹ There are a number of accounts of considerate treatment accorded junior officers Fisher felt deserving and in need of assistance, the cheerfulness of his behavior, and his unassuming manner when in their company.¹² However, the manner in which he often treated his more senior subordinates had the effect, in many cases, of earning him their permanent enmity and doing considerable damage. One brief illustration not yet mentioned is quite helpful. It is drawn from the experience of Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, the Submarine Force Commander in 1914, "Why can't that fellow Keyes go to sea and fight like Trywhitt,"¹³ was Fisher's comment to a group of officers in the Admiralty. When this reached Keyes, who was known as one of the most dashing officers in the Navy, and had been ordered to remain ashore so that he could effectively control his submarines, it helped to confirm him in his impression that he could not possibly continue in charge of the submarine force. His departure soon afterwards appears to have been detrimental to the submarine effort to a considerable degree.

H. Relations with Superiors. A view of Fisher's relations with superiors indicates that he must be considered highly effective in this

¹¹Marder, Road to War, p. 14.

¹²H. H. Smith gives a number of examples.

¹³Keyes, Naval Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 13.

area. He worked in relative harmony with a variety of personalities as First Lord; King Edward VII was a close friend and loyal supporter. The position of the civilian First Lord has been discussed earlier (Chapter III). Thus, there is no doubt that Fisher was the direct subordinate of the First Lord during this period, a fact which is sometimes slurred over. The position of the King is also of importance. Constitutionally, his power is essentially nil. Practically, his influence can be immense, since he is the titular head of the service and the grantor of each officer's commission. There are many anecdotes of the effect of Fisher's volatile and energetic temperament in the somewhat stuffy court circles, and of the high regard Edward VII had for him. Fisher's reaction on his death was, "I've lost the greatest friend I ever had..."¹⁴ One of the anecdotes is quoted in full. It illustrates well Fisher's regard for the King's opinion, although action did not follow, and one of the more unfortunate aspects of Fisher's personality. Fisher writes:¹⁵

Just then a certain Admiral approached--perhaps the biggest ass I ever met. The King shook hands with him and said something I thought quite unnecessarily loving to him; when he had gone he turned on me like a tiger and said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" I humbly said, "What for?" "Why!" he replied, "when that man came up to me your face was perfectly demoniacal! Everyone saw it and the poor fellow couldn't kick you back! You're First Sea Lord and he's a ruined man! You've no business to show your hate!"...then a man came up I knew the King did perfectly hate...He greeted him as if he was his long lost brother, and then he turned to me afterwards and said with joyful revenge, "Well! Did you see that." ...no wonder he was so popular.

¹⁴Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2, p. 326.

¹⁵Memories and Records, Vol. 1, p. 23.

I. Some Additional Notes on Fisher's Personality. One aspect of Fisher's personality is not brought out in the earlier discussion. Much of the material in the literature creates an impression of a paranoid tendency.

First, he was markedly suspicious of others, both as to their motives and their actions toward him. He often said and wrote:

I entered the Navy penniless, friendless and forlorn. I had had to fight like hell, and fighting like hell has made me what I am.¹⁶

His correspondence abounds in such phrases as: "Lord Everly behaved most disgracefully toward me...I'm damned if he didn't quote my private conversation..."¹⁷ and "There is also to be a personal attack, by Lord Glasgow, I believe...on your humble servant..."¹⁸ His suspicions of Germany, of course well founded, and of other foreign nations, find equally frequent expression. A more complex and elaborate illustration of his suspicion is in the incident related by Keyes.¹⁹

Second, he thought, and wrote, and often acted, in a highly aggressive imagery and vindictive manner, as illustrated earlier. His habitual violence of speech was well shown by his speeches at the Hague Peace Conference of 1899. Very few Flag Officers in history would have suggested boiling prisoners in oil to such a gathering.²⁰

¹⁶Marder, Road to War, p. 15.

¹⁷Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 2, p. 199.

¹⁸Marder, Fear God and Dread Nought, p. 69.

¹⁹Keyes, The Naval Memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, pp. 20 ff., referred to in Chapter XI, Section A.

²⁰Marder, Road to War, p. 86.

J. Conclusion. The personality of Fisher presents many contradictions for one in his position and of his accomplishments. There is no question but that his greatest strength, in terms of the leader behavior descriptions used, was in the areas of organization, representation, and relations with superiors. He was less strong in communications, and very weak in the areas of integration and relations with subordinates.

It would appear that the successful leadership achieved is not difficult to account for. Fisher's complete dedication to the readiness of the Navy and his country were obvious. His ability to organize movement toward this goal and to carry the rest of the Admiralty and the government of the day along with him was sufficient to gain him the respect and loyalty of a large majority of the service, particularly the younger element below flag rank, and to overcome the difficulties he created in the other areas. Our own more recent experience tells us that what seems like disastrous dissension, when viewed at the seat of the government, may seem only minor disagreement when viewed from the fleet.

Fisher was clearly of great mental capacity, imagination, breadth of mind and drive; in short an executive of extraordinary talent. It is perhaps open to question how far his creative ability extended, or how deep his insight was. It seems to the writer that his capacity for profound analysis may not have as great as his other abilities.

K. Having taken a brief overview of the accomplishments, and the problems of the Fisher regime, and a look at the characteristics of the creator of both, it remains to draw some conclusions both general and

specific. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to remember that there is one ultimate test of Sea Power, and that is war. Therefore, it seems appropriate to open Part III with a brief treatment of those aspects of World War I which seem to most directly reflect the Fisher decisions and influence within the period of this study.

PART III - RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER XIII

WORLD WAR I - SOME PARTICULAR ASPECTS

A. Introduction. This discussion of World War I is of a very strictly confined nature. As mentioned earlier, the subject is huge: there are entire libraries on it; the writer is not qualified by any means to attempt such a work, and finally, the events and evaluations are familiar and well documented history.

It is a generally acknowledged fact that the Fleet which fought the war and held the North Sea to finally starve out the Germans, in both men and ships, was the creation of Fisher. A flag officer who was never an admirer stated the situation quite simply in July 1914, looking at the assembled fleet, "All that is best and most modern here is the creation of Lord Fisher."¹ For this reason, the positive aspects of the accomplishment can be left to the judgment of history. There are certain negative aspects of material and leadership which have been much debated and are directly traceable to decisions and actions of the Fisher era. These logically form a part of this study. Fisher's performance himself, from November 1915 to May 1915, during his brief return as First Sea Lord, falls outside the limits set for the study and would add little to other examples of management already set out. The methods were the same; at 74 the man was not what he had been, and the results, while significant, showed this.

¹Sir Robert Arbuthnot, quoted in Jameson, The Fleet that Jack Built, p. 167.

Therefore, only a few specific points are discussed: the training, to indicate how closely the 1914 Royal Navy was still Fishers; the ships; and some aspects of the operational performance of the Admiralty and Fleet Commanders.

B. The Interim - 1911-1913.² Sir A. K. Wilson, "Old 'Art" to the lower deck, was an officer of great integrity and considerable personal administrative ability, but inarticulate to a degree and highly secretive. He also was much opposed to a Naval Staff. However, a change of government brought Winston Churchill as First Lord in 1911. Supported by Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg as Second Sea Lord, with Beatty as Naval Secretary, and in any case an admirer of Fisher's accomplishments, Churchill pursued, with more diplomacy, the path of reform.

A War Staff was organized, with planning responsibility for the operational side of war as an integrated whole. This was a unique organization in the history of the Admiralty, and the problem of training officers in staff work was not one which could be dealt with in two years.

Churchill consulted Fisher freely. The latter was living abroad, until mid- 1912, and the extent of their collaboration was not widely known. Churchill kept it as quiet as possible, although some public notice was taken when Fisher was appointed to the Oil Fuel Commission in 1912.

The major accomplishments of the Churchill period, aside from the War Staff, were: the introduction of oil fuel for heavy ships; the QUEEN ELIZABETH class of battleships with 15" guns, heavy protection and

²Main sources: Road to War, The Fleet that Jack Built, Fear God and Dread Nought, Vol. 3, pp. 2-3.

25 knots speed; further important revisions of the Naval Discipline Act, pay and promotion for the "lower deck" in 1912. The Fisher influence is clear from his letters on all of those steps. Development and building of battleships continued at a rapid pace.

C. The Ships - 1914.

1. Cruisers. In 1914, the early operations of the war revealed one major deficiency in the shipbuilding programs between 1905 and 1911. It will be recalled that Fisher's 1904 scheme proposed nothing but armored, that is, battle cruisers and heavy destroyers. The battle cruisers had, as the Germans built equivalent ships, tended to concentrate in the North Sea. The advent of the submarine made the use of a battle cruiser for blockade duties, which involved stopping to examine merchantmen, a ridiculous risk. The high cost of battle cruisers had limited their numbers severely so that the detachment of INVINCIBLE and INFLEXIBLE to carry out a mission of the sort they were built for, the Falklands campaign of late 1914, was only reluctantly accepted by Jellicoe, in command of the Grand Fleet.³ The protection of trade turned out to have been adequately provided for until the advent of the submarine as a commerce destroyer, foreseen only in 1913 by Fisher and few others. The losses in foreign waters were not important. However, ships for the blockade of Germany were not available. The large destroyers of the Fisher era, and a few "scouts" slightly large and slower, had not the sea-keeping qualities nor the range for the purpose. The armed passenger liners

³Bennett, Coronel and the Falklands, p. 117. Also Naval Operations, Vol 1.

and old cruisers used proved highly vulnerable to surface and submarine attack. The Grand Fleet and its supplementary forces suffered also from a lack of ships with the necessary range and sea-keeping ability for scouting. The last armored cruisers of moderate dimensions were completed in 1908; no cruisers except the scouts were completed between 1905 and 1911, when the first of the "Town" class came into service. Only 12 of this type had been completed by the outbreak of war.⁴ The situation was recognized by Fisher's successors but the building program to remedy the situation had just begun at the outbreak of war.

This cruiser shortage must be considered an error in judgment by Fisher; the writer does not agree that it was as important as is implied by Mr. Young's statement cited earlier.⁵ This statement may be an echo of some of the judgments of Lloyd George on the war, many of which have not withstood the test of time.

2. Battle Cruisers. The problems of these ships have been mentioned in the discussions of their design. They are often spoken of as a type which was poorly designed. This point of view is to the writer superficial; rather, the missions and circumstances of operations for which the ships were designed were too specialized and not sufficiently analyzed. The writer in "Brassey" in 1908, already mentioned, reflects a doubt which must surely have been fairly widespread at the time, and

⁴H. M. LeFleming, Warships of World War I.

⁵Chapter III, p. 15.

seems to have been well founded.

3. Submarines. Despite Fisher's interest in submarines, Keyes⁶ blamed the lack of ocean-going types in 1914 on him, since he had been primarily interested in them as a coast defense weapon. It is also true that A. K. Wilson, in 1902, considered them an "inferior and un-English" weapon, an opinion shared by many. However, Churchill pressed the development of submarines, which proceeded with a clear goal. While Keyes is perhaps a little unfair, therefore, it does seem that if a policy of developing the submarine as a sea-going weapon had been originated under Fisher, the state of affairs would have been different in 1914. It is also clear that Fisher himself did not appreciate the potentialities of the submarine as a weapon until 1913 or thereabouts.⁷ This failure if it was one, was of omission--a non-application of judgment, rather than a mis-application. A correct appraisal of the case by Fisher in 1913 would have put him well in advance of contemporary thought.

D. Operational Performance.

1. Perhaps the most important question of the influence of the Fisher era in World War I is raised by the performance of the operational leadership. This also is a question with which the available literature up to now does not deal with objectively or in detail. Professor Marder states⁸ that it is the focus of his work at the present time; succeeding

⁶Keyes, Naval Memoirs, Vol. 1, pp. 101-2.

⁷Marder, Road to War, p. 333.

⁸Letter to the writer, September 1963.

volumes of From The Dreadnought to Scapa Flow will undoubtedly fill this gap. However, some evaluation of this performance is essential, since there is little doubt that the leaders, as well as the ships, of 1914 were products of the Fisher era. The officers up to the rank of Captain had gained all their most significant training and experience since 1905, under the increased pace and constant introduction of new ships and material. The more senior officers had been selected (by the duties they were assigned) for their higher rank during the Fisher period. Not all were products of the "Fishpond," but not many had been numbered among Fisher's active opponents.

The topic divides conveniently into areas: the personnel of the ships; the Admiralty; and the Fleet commanders.

2. Ships Personnel. This is the most favorable as well as the simplest area. The ships officers of the period were highly motivated, -- had the utmost confidence in their ships and equipment⁹ and were backed by enlisted personnel of ability and loyalty. Their training had been intensive and realistic. Cunningham, H. H. Smith, Dreyer, Wemyss, Chatfield¹⁰ and many others have left vivid word pictures of the vigor and realism with which training of all sorts was carried out in the years preceding the war. Gunnery was of a high standard, as

⁹Marder, Road to War, p. 413.

¹⁰See Bibliography.

far as the doctrine of the day had carried it. However, long range high speed firings had only been introduced¹¹ in 1913 under Beatty. It seems reasonable to say that as far as the officers and men of the ships are concerned, the Royal Navy entered World War I in as high a state of readiness as has ever been achieved at such a time.

3. The Admiralty as an Operational Headquarters. When war broke out, the Admiralty in Whitehall found that they were in fact an operational headquarters to a degree which they had not suspected before the war. The Fleet Commander, specifically the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet had neither the time, staff, information nor responsibility to control the multitude of subsidiary tasks such as blockade, minesweeping and patrolling which speedily became necessary. Furthermore, it soon became apparent from some 1914 operations that the North Sea was a confined body of water and required the attention of an area commander for proper employment of forces, as well as, or instead of, a Fleet Commander-in-Chief. These duties devolved upon the Admiralty as the only existing common authority. Additionally, the world-wide nature of the conflict soon became apparent; the coordination problems were only equalled by those of World War II. A final complication was the emergence of Churchill's liking for strategy and tactics, which led more immediately and positively than might otherwise have been the case to centralized operational control by the Admiralty.

¹¹Marder, Portrait of an Admiral. Interestingly enough they indicate strongly that Fisher may have been right about Sturdee's limited abilities.

This study does not have a place for extensive examples of the problems which arose. It is certain that the Admiralty's performance of this function was less than optimum. Those who served there in 1914-1918 and left records, among them Richmond, Weymss, Jellicoe and Keyes, are in agreement that the difficulties and failures of coordination and strategic planning were numerous, and continued to be so throughout the war. The staff organization was not set up for the handling of routine operational decision and proper staff work on major decisions. Their position was primarily advisory. Richmond's diaries are scathing in the early part of the war, and critical throughout. Captain Roskill's analysis,¹² drawing somewhat on Richmond's, concludes that as a whole the performance of British sea power was disappointing. This the writer cannot fully agree with. After all is said and done, if the High Seas Fleet had gained control of the North Sea, or if the Royal Navy with the U. S. had not beaten the submarine in 1917-18, the results of the war would surely have been quite different. Both Richmond and Roskill attribute the poor performance of the Admiralty to the lack of organized and trained naval staff, and to a lack of appreciation of the need for an intellectual or analytical approach to strategy. This analysis seems quite accurate. There seems to be little doubt that if Fisher had seen a need and organized a Naval Staff in 1905, the situation would have been vastly different. The basic difficulty in 1914-18 in the Admiralty would appear to have been an inability to get the operational matters

¹²S. W. Roskill, The Strategy of Sea Power, pp. 101-42, especially p. 139. A 1962 book.

out of the traditional channels of the Sea Lords, which were primarily administrative in intent. This was plainly the result of neither staff nor Sea Lords having a knowledge of operational staff methods. Captain Roskill attributes this to the influx of technical matters early in the 20th century which took over naval education and training. The writer does not agree that this is necessarily cause and effect. Fisher evidently did not see the necessity for staff, despite the available example of the German General Staff, which was already famous as a land organization. Churchill did, but none of Fisher's successors possessed the inclination or drive needed to make a naval staff a going concern inside four years.

It must be said that in this particular, Beresford was right. However, Beresford's writing does not create the impression of a man likely to develop such a suggestion. An interesting study might be tracking down the true originator. A nodding acquaintance with the candidates suggests Custance.

4. Fleet Leadership. As before, this paper does not have a place for an extensive discussion of this extensively debated subject. A few general points are drawn which can be considered products of the Fisher era.

Opinions have varied in the last forty years as to whether Beatty or Jellicoe was the hero or villain of Jutland; a tremendous amount has been written on the subject. Yet the very disparity of the approach of these two officers to naval warfare indicates a fundamental problem which

might have been solved by a thoroughly broad-gauge approach to the problems of 20th century naval war when they arrived in the Fisher era. Jellicoe was an officer of high talent in all fields who possessed the complete confidence of his subordinates and superiors. He was a master of his profession, as well as a fine administrator, with an alert and precise mind. He was inclined to be cautious and a little pessimistic;¹³ this appears early, even in some of his comments during the Naval Crisis of 1909. He fully understood the truth of what Churchill said of him: "He was the only man who could lose the war in an afternoon." This was the philosophy behind the letter he wrote the Admiralty in late 1914, setting forth his intent not to press an action if he believed there was danger from submarines or mines.

Beatty, on the other hand, was a most aggressive individual who wanted only to get to grips with the enemy and believed that this was the only way to success. He was not thoughtless or reckless, as he has sometimes been evaluated. His judgment and mentality were judged most keen by many contemporaries, then and after the war as First Sea Lord.

The point here is not the merits of these two officers. The point is that almost the only view the two ever had in common, except of course Jellicoe's orders which Beatty was bound to follow when in company, was a knowledge that column and long range were logical fighting methods for modern ships.

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The Grand Fleet, The Crisis of the Naval War, and The Submarine Peril are all quite depressing reading; some of the statements of German capabilities are clearly exaggerated.

This situation argues a lack of operational doctrine in the Royal Navy of 1914. The need for such a doctrine, which guides the thoughts and actions of officers of varying temperaments and coordinates them without detailed instructions, was one of the lessons drawn from Jutland by the U. S. Navy. Commander Frost commented that if the destroyers at the rear of the Grand Fleet line during the night encounter after Jutland had been U. S., the result might have been different. He was not casting an aspersion on the destroyer COs concerned, far from it. He was commenting on the absence of a doctrine to guide but not rigidly control their actions in such a situation.¹⁴ The Royal Navy view of that day was that such matters were for the Admiral concerned. If he chose to take the line that the battle required elaborate and detailed orders, and close tactical control of every movement, as did Jellicoe, he was at liberty to do so. If he believed, as did Beatty, that loss of ships was not vital if a decisive result was obtained, this was a matter within his discretion.

A doctrine had existed in Nelson's day. His comments on "the order of sailing is the order of battle" and "no captain can be very wrong if he lays his vessel alongside that of the enemy" were an application of a doctrine which required attack at all costs, and which had court martialled many officers for "failure to do their utmost to destroy the enemy." That doctrine was St. Vincent's creation in large part.

¹⁴Frost, The Battle of Jutland.

This is not to say that a doctrine of a very aggressive type was desirable. It is to say that if as much time and effort had been put into developing a doctrine for use of the material produced in the Fisher era as went into providing that material, the battle performance in World War I would have been more uniform.

To the writer, this situation is more explanatory of the variations in performance and differences in method, as well as the lack of confidence in, and impatience with, instructions from higher authority, than any basic differences in personalities. There may have been, as Marder suggests, a lack of talent at the top of the list, but this seems less important than the lack of doctrine to unite the thinking of this talent. In studying any modern war, it must always be remembered that a difference of 2 or 3 years in the date of outbreak would have changed the leadership almost entirely.

It is perhaps unfair to lay this lack of a doctrine entirely on the doorstep of the Fisher administration. However, a thoroughly comprehensive approach to the instrument and its employment at the same time might have provided one.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions to be drawn from this study should of course be those of the reader, looking at the rebuilding of a Navy as an operation of management. Nevertheless, the writer has some opinions, both in the areas in which the "Fisher Revolution" results were satisfactory or the reverse and on the lessons which we may draw from this example.

A. The Particular. The Royal Navy at the start of the revolution was a quite centralized organization, once one passed from the individual ship level, especially in matters of administration, material and policy. Fisher, as we have seen, centralized the control of the Admiralty in turn so that it is correct to say that while there were many other individuals concerned, the guiding and driving force was Fisher himself.

In Chapter XII, some of his personal characteristics were briefly examined. It is perhaps helpful to consider his abilities and faults in present day terms.

Obviously he had many strengths which add up to extraordinary executive ability. His mental capacity for detail was tremendous, coupled with an exceptional skill at selecting key ideas and fitting them together into a coherent whole. He delegated detailed planning most skillfully, getting the benefits of others abilities, yet retaining control of the direction and result. Whatever the results of his methods

of supervising and controlling the execution of plans were in human terms, it cannot be denied that the achievements of this brief period were immense--his methods got results and commanded loyal support from many. Those whose loyalty he could not win sufficiently to get results, he was able to drive into producing results by sheer force of personality. He was skilled far beyond the age in the manipulation of the environment outside the service to gain his ends. The degree of press, governmental and public support he was able to gain for policies of the most radical sort has seldom been equalled. By the time he had lost this support to a serious degree, the public demand was for more of the Navy he had been able to build.

For all his capacities, he does not give an impression of great depth in thought. While he saw the strategic implications of the rise of Germany, he did not develop his thoughts on the employment of the instrument he built up enough to see all the implications of its use in war. What is more important, when others brought forward opinions which might have broadened or modified his thinking, if he could not perceive the value of the opinions himself at once, he labelled them as nonsense and refused to give them detailed consideration. This is a product of his immense confidence in his own judgment. Strategy was not his interest. Speculative projections of the future in detail, weighing all factors, were not natural to his thought processes. The results of these shortcomings were brought out in the discussion of World War I at the beginning of this section and need not be detailed

again. It is sufficient to say that some less than optimum features of the Navy in that struggle can be traced to his administration. It must also be said in the same breath that the results, had he not revolutionized the Navy, would have been far less good.

His methods within the service were the most drastic shock the Navy had received in a century. It is very likely true that drastic methods and a tremendously forceful personality were essential to the results. It is equally evident, that his periodic vindictive, suspicious, and violent conduct was harmful to the Navy. '...there was something about him which goaded enmity to dementia...' is a very valid and succinct statement and not what one wishes to hear of a genuinely great man. Winston Churchill has contributed a paragraph which seems a good statement of the situation:¹

There is no doubt whatever that Fisher was right in nine-tenths of what he fought for. His great reforms sustained the power of the Royal Navy at the most critical period in its history. He gave the Navy the kind of shock which the British Army received at the time of the South African War. After a long period of serene and unchallenged complacency, the mutter of distant thunder could be heard. It was Fisher who hoisted the storm-signal and beat all hands to quarters. He forced every department of the Naval Service to review its position and question its own existence. He shook them and beat them and cajoled them out of slumber into intense activity. But the Navy was not a pleasant place while this was going on. The 'Band of Brothers' tradition which Nelson handed down was for the time, but only for the time, discarded.

B. The Abstract. The Fisher era is an illustration of a distinction of great importance to those responsible for organization, military or otherwise. The distinction is between centralized decision making and

¹ Churchill, The World Crisis, Vol. 1, pp. 74-5; also quoted by Marder, in Road to War.

one man rule. There is a major difference between one man supported by a staff of definitely subordinate technical experts, and a man supported by a responsible staff capable of independent judgment and recommendations. There is no distinction between the ultimate responsibility for the decision-- there is a very great distinction in the way it is reached. I submit that history (which Fisher called a record of exploded ideas) shows us the overall superiority of the latter method.

A second important abstraction has to do with the drawbacks of monolithic organization. Monolithic organizations seem on charts, and from a superficial view, highly desirable for efficiency. However, difference of opinion or controversy is not permissible within the monolith. Those of strong opposite views, which may be valid, feel unable to make themselves heard within the monolith. They either do not do so, or do so from without. In either case, the benefit of their brains is lost. It appears that disagreement must be organized for if we are to avoid error and bitter controversy, both of which can only have a negative effect in an organization which must have a common goal.

A third important abstraction has to do with the areas of human relations and communication. Clearly, the negative results which marred the achievements of the era can almost all be traced to failures of communication in both directions, and to failure to utilize human relations, rather than brute force, as a means of modifying the conduct of others. It seems very probable that better performance in these areas would have improved the results of the Fisher Revolution: it is certain that the negative results form an excellent example of the consequences of neglect of these factors in managing an organization.

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APPENDIX I

Excerpted from The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Admiral of the Fleet - Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon.

SYNOPSIS OF LORD FISHER'S CAREER

Early Years

Born 25th January, 1841, at Rambodde, Ceylon. Son of Captain William Fisher, 78th Highlanders and Sophia, daughter of A. Lambe.

Entered the Royal Navy, 13th June, 1854. Joined his first ship, the VICTORY, at Portsmouth.

Served in the Russian War, in the Baltic in HMS CALCUTTA.

Served in the China War, 1856-60, including the capture of Canton and the Peiho forts.

1860 - 1872

Lieutenant, 4th November, 1860.

3rd November 1866, was appointed to HMS EXCELLENT, gunnery schoolship at Portsmouth (Captain Arthur W. A. Hood).

2nd August 1869, promoted to Commander and appointed to the China flagship.

1872 - 1881

19th September, 1872, was appointed to HMS EXCELLENT for torpedo service. Started the VERNON as a torpedo schoolship. Visited Fiume to arrange for the purchase of the Whitehead torpedo.

20th October, 1874, promoted to Captain, and reappointed to EXCELLENT for torpedo service and instructional duties, remaining until 1876.

15th March, 1877, appointed Flag-Captain to Admiral Sir A. Cooper-Key, Commander-in-Chief, North American Station, in the BELLEROPHON.

1881 - 1882

18th January, 1881, appointed to command INFLEXIBLE, the largest ship in the Navy.

1883 - 1890

6th April, 1883, appointed to command of EXCELLENT gunnery school-ship.

1st November, 1886, appointed Director of Naval Ordnance, occupied this post for four and a half years. Carried out the transfer of Naval ordnance and ordnance stores from War Office to the Admiralty.

2nd August, 1890, promoted to Rear-Admiral.

21st May, 1891, appointed Admiral-Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard. Expedited the building of the ROYAL SOVEREIGN, the first of a new type of battleship.

1st February 1892, appointed Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy.

8th May, 1896, promoted Vice-Admiral.

24th August, 1897, hoisted his flag in RENOWN as Commander-in-Chief, North American Station.

In 1899, attended the first Hague Peace Conference as a Naval Delegate.

1899 - 1902

8th July, 1899, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Station.

2nd November, 1901, promoted Admiral.

1902 - 1904

5th June, 1902, returned to the Admiralty as Second Sea Lord remaining until 31st August, 1903.

25th December, 1902, launched the new scheme of naval entry and education of officers with training colleges at Osborne and Dartmouth.

31st August, 1903, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth in order to supervise personally the inauguration of the new scheme at Osborne.

21st October, 1904, appointed First Sea Lord in Lord Selborne's administration. On same date appointed First and Principal Naval Aide-de-Camp to King Edward.

6th December, 1904, Admiralty memorandum on the distribution of the Fleet, introducing the nucleus-crew system for ships in reserve and withdrawing obsolete craft from foreign stations.

January 1905, committee to inquire into the reorganization of the Dockyards.

6th March, 1905, appointment of an Inspector of Target Practice.

10th February, 1906, launch of the DREADNOUGHT.

November 1906, establishment of the Naval War College at Portsmouth.

January 1907, institution of a service of Fleet Auxiliaries - ammunition and store ships, distilling, hospital, fleet repair ships; trawlers as mine-sweepers, etc. etc.

March 1907, creation of the Home Fleet, with DREADNOUGHT as flagship, for service in the North Sea.

August 1907, new scheme of advancement of pay of naval ranks and ratings introduced.

September 1907, establishment of wireless telegraphy branch, and installation erected on Admiralty building.

25th January, 1910, retired from the office of First Sea Lord.

30th July, 1912, appointed Chairman of the Royal Commission on oil fuel and oil engines for the Navy.

30th October, 1914, recalled to the Admiralty.

15th May, 1915, resignation as First Sea Lord.

10th July, 1920, died in London.

APPENDIX II

The Committee on Designs¹ and other notes on DREADNOUGHT.

This was the most famous and probably the most "high priced" of Fisher's many committees. It is probably the best example of his ability to get men of every sort to work for him effectively when he wished to.

Rear Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg	- Director of Naval Intelligence - At this period the ONI had the responsibility for war plans and requirements.
Rear Admiral Sir John Durston	- Engineer in Chief
Rear Admiral A. L. Winslow	- Commanding Flotillas (Destroyers and Submarines)
Captain Henry A. Jackson	- Controller - mentioned earlier, responsible overall for the design and construction of the ships of the Navy
Captain John R. Jellicoe	- Director of Naval Ordnance
Captain Charles E. Madden	- Naval Assistant to the Controller
Captain R. H. S. Bacon	- Naval Assistant to First Sea Lord (and later first CO of DREADNOUGHT)
Phillip Watts	- Director of Naval Construction
Lord Kelvin	- The scientist and electrical inventor. His two specialties were electrical and marine devices.
Professor J. H. Biles	- University of Glasgow (Naval Architect)
Sir John Thornycroft	- Shipbuilder (John I. Thornycroft, a design and building firm)
Alexander Gracie	- Fairfield Shipbuilding Company (another leading shipbuilding firm)
R. E. Froude	- Superintendent, Admiralty Experimental Works (one of the best known naval architects of the time. "Froudes Ratio" still used in ship design)

¹Fisher Papers, British Battleships, Warships of World War I.

It is of record that the committee made extensive changes in the original "Fisher Gard" sketch design, which involved 3 super-firing turrets at each end. The committee was also advised by Charles A. Parsons, the inventor, and at the time the only builder, of turbine machinery. The deliberations indicate that most of the discussions had to do with gun arrangements and propulsion machinery. This is logical since the ship size was determined by the armament (and protection) and thereafter by the machinery which could produce the required speed.

It is also worthy of note that although DREADNOUGHT and INVINCIBLE at about 20,000 were both considered monstrous ships in 1905, by 1912 the designed maximum displacement had grown to 33,000 tons for the battleships, (QUEEN ELIZABETH) and 35,000 for battle cruisers (TIGER).

In 1914, the Grand Fleet included 35 DREADNOUGHTS and 10 battle cruisers: this is the derivation of Admiral Jameson's title, "The Fleet that Jack Built."

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